

By the same Author

WILL WAR COME TO INDIA ?

ONIONS & OPINIONS

BY
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WITH A PREFACE BY
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Most of the essays collected in this volume originally appeared in various newspapers and magazines before the war, a few being of later vintage. The author is indebted to their editors (and particularly to the Editors of the *Bombay Chronicle* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta) for permission to reprint them.

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I. CULT OF THE CAT

IT IS raining cats and dogs and monsoon, or at any rate its Bombay edition, is not exactly a tonic for one's muse. It is damp and grey, within and without, and here do I sit vainly struggling with pen and paper.

It is raining cats and dogs...and there is Pussy lying on the sofa, curled up and content, unmindful of the storm that is raging without, unheedful of the fix that her master is in.

But what vain delusion! Can I call myself Pussy's master? Can that aristocratic creature, proud and peaceful, possibly owe any fealty to anybody? How haughtily does she carry herself! Even if she has any feelings of love and loyalty for me, she does not certainly believe in wearing them on her sleeve.

Let the dog surrender his soul to man. Let him wag his tail and grovel before his master. But the cat will ever remain aloof, imperious and imperturbable. It has not forfeited its native freedom in spite of its association with human kind for centuries upon centuries. Every other domesticated creature will be wellnigh lost without man—the lord and the master.

But even if the whole of humanity is by any holocaust wiped away from the face of the earth, the cat would go on, serene and sure.

Both the cat and the dog have been associated with man from the earliest dawn of history. But if the dog has generally been taken for granted, the cat has always been viewed with a certain degree of suspicion. The former may have been glorified for his faith, but the latter was certainly respected in its own right. The dog has ever been a dependable, domestic pet ; the cat has never completely forgotten its ancestry of the wilds.

History tells us that the early Egyptians worshipped the cat as a god. A large number of mummified cats have been found in the land of the Pharaohs. In medieval times cats were somehow connected with witchcraft and a large number of them were slaughtered by superstitious folk.

The cat, however, survived this heresy hunt, probably on the strength of its nine lives, an attribute which must have apparently been invented in those days. Gradually the cult of the cat began to spread until to-day Pussy for all her freedom and waywardness is accepted as a pet of the family.

The antipathy against cats, nevertheless, has survived yet. For every one person that does not like a dog, there must easily be ten who dislike a cat. And while the dislike against the dog is mostly of a negative character, that against the cat is generally positive and pronounced. It is a veritable loathing,

an aversion which possibly springs from the superstitious belief of the middle ages.

It is even now considered an ill omen among the Hindus if a cat crosses one's path, when out on a particularly important errand. It is notorious that some people have almost a morbid hatred of the cat, and that it amounts to a major obsession of their lives. Lord Roberts was a famous "case" of this type. Everyone, indeed, can find a real cat-hater in one's particular circle, while those who dislike the dog dismiss him with a mere shrug of the shoulders.

This hatred is fortunately counterbalanced by an equally extreme love in other "cases." Pussy can claim among her admirers some of the greatest characters in history. Mahomet was one, and Richelieu, Montaigne and Abraham Lincoln were all devotees of the tabby.

It was a famous remark of the times that the only serious rival of Laura, whom Petrarch has immortalised in his sonnets was—the Poet's Cat! That lucky cat, indeed, is more authentic than the lady. You might have heard Byron's lines :

*Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife,
He would have written Sonnets all his life?*

And finally, Boswell himself has noted with a doleful candour that the great Dr. Johnson very frankly preferred his cat's company to that of his faithful biographer!

It is significant that while the dog has received a rich measure of man's affection and homage, which

has often found expression in literature, it is the cat which sends *Homo Sapiens* in a really contemplative mood. Playful and philosophic, so affectionate and yet so cruel, the cat is a conundrum to all, who have the capacity to reflect.

“Faithful like a dog,” we say of a man ; but the woman we always compare to a cat—even if it be in malice. *Felis* typifies the infinite mystery of femininity, the eternal enigma that is Eve.

How many proverbs are built around the cat ! I have already referred to its nine lives, which are, of



Has anybody ever seen a cat in a circus menagerie ?

course, a gross exaggeration and a grosser libel. Then the grin of the Cheshire cat is famous as also the pride of her Siamese cousin.

“It is a sotill mouse that sleepeth in the catty’s ear,” we are told. That “The cat shuts her eyes when she steals cream,” can be easily proved to be false. And has ever “Care killed the cat?”—I wonder. “Though the cat winks a while, she is not blind,” is a just tribute to its vigilance. Lastly “A cat may look at a king,” though it is not likely ever to care to.

Has anybody ever seen a cat in a circus menagerie? From performing fleas to waltzing elephants—you see all animal creation gathered in the saw-dust ring doing obeisance to the Human God; all—except a cat! That itself is the most revealing tribute to its sturdy independence. It simply refuses to degrade itself to be a “trained” animal, and though the tamest of all tame pets, it disdains to do any tricks at the crack of the ring-master’s whip.

Nor does a cat care for the intelligence standards by which we humans are wont to assess the mental receptivity of our dumb friends. We occasionally read of a horse which can count and a dog which can read. But such a phenomenon can never happen in the case of a cat. Yet Pussy’s cleverness needs no human mirror. It stands self-evident.

Observe her licking herself all over with a thoroughness and a fastidiousness all her own, and take from her a lesson in cleanliness. Notice her catching a mouse and realise the utter absence of

passion in her apparently cruel conduct—which is the fundamental teaching of the *Bhagawad Gita* (The Song Celestial). Watch her leaping from a window sill and mark her amazing agility, sense of balance, sheer grace :

*A little lion, small and dainty sweet
With sea-grey eyes and softly-stepping feet.*

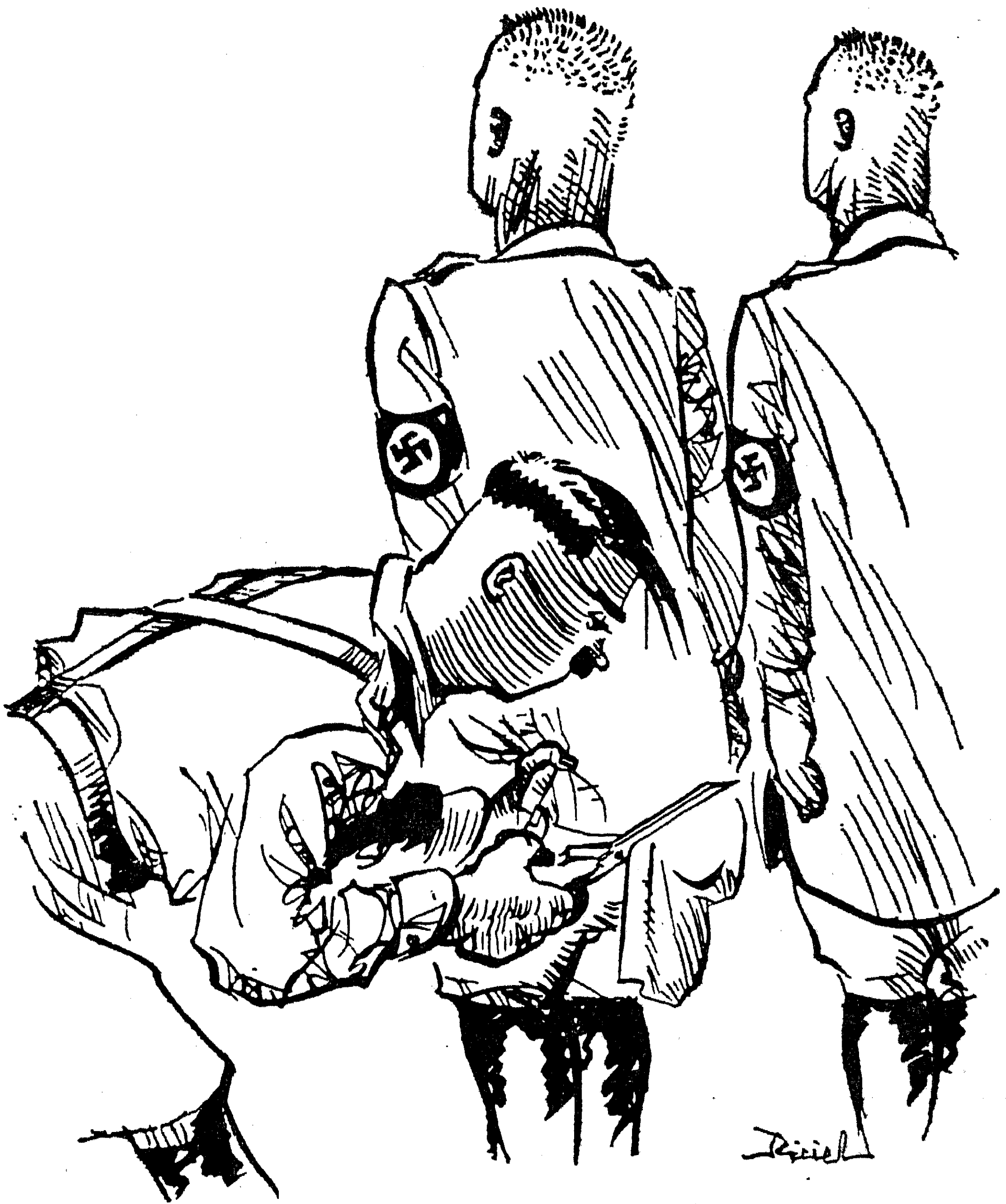
It is raining cats and dogs...and Pussy is lying on the sofa, curled up and content. She is not the one to care for my praises !

* * *
* *
*

set the modern Dictatorial fashion of clothing one's followers into a distinctive shirt. Black for the Fascist blackguards was a capital selection indeed! Hitler copied the idea (like many others) from his Italian prototype and merely altered the colour and cut of the shirt—though I hardly think that brown is a colour suitable for the blond, very, very Aryan Nazis. Something more vivid would have served as a better background for the Swastika.

But even the Brown Shirt is worrying the Nazis, for a shirt after all requires more cloth than a tunic. So after much scratching of their close-cropped heads, the economic dictators of Germany decided to make the shirt a special plank in their national self-sufficiency programme just before the war. They ordained that shirt-tails should be five centimetres the shorter. They in fact considered that there was no reason at all why the two sides of a shirt should vary in length and they accordingly decided that both the sides should be of equal and of the minimum possible length!

They thus killed two birds with one stone. Apart from staving off a national shortage of cloth, they also solved a sartorial problem which has long puzzled many of us: Why should a shirt have a tail at all? But even here the Nazi dictators can hardly claim to be original. For it was long ago observed by a world-famous economist that if the Chinaman increased the length of his shirt by half an inch, the problem of over-production of cotton in the world would be automatically solved. One thus realises the standing



...accordingly decided that both the sides should be of equal length.

of the shirt in world economy and the next time you order your shirt, bear this profound significance of your transaction in mind.

So now we see that a shirt is a factor in the world's (1) Economy, (2) Politics and (3) Geography, besides fulfilling its legitimate function of covering one's

torso. I hope the irate reader, who professed to have no interest in shirts, will now revise his opinion. By the way, I wonder whether the esteemed correspondent ever put his shirt on a horse. I may assure him that this simple act will germinate in his mind an immense interest in his shirt. He will never again refer to it so triflingly. For myself much as I value my shirt while it is on my own back, I value it a hundred times more whenever I put it on the shining back of a long-priced thoroughbred.

The shirt is famous in literature—at least the “Song Of The Shirt” is. T. Hood’s saga of the shirt-maker who was

*In poverty, hunger and dirt
Sewing at once, with a double thread
A shroud as well as a shirt.*

is said to have brought about a minor industrial revolution in Victorian England.

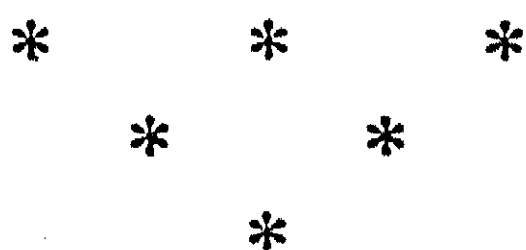
Nessus’ shirt is as famous as the Trojan horse in classical history and Shakespeare frequently refers to it. It was a time-honoured method of doing away with one’s adversary—a stratagem which was not unknown to our Indian princes.

The story goes that Nessus was the centaur who carried the wife of Hercules over a river and attempting to run away with her, was shot by Hercules. As the centaur was dying, he told Deianira that if she steeped her husband’s shirt in his blood, she would secure his love for ever. This she did but when Hercules put the shirt on, his body suffered such agony that he

rushed to Mount Oeta, collected together a pile of wood, set it on fire and rushing into the midst of the flames was burnt to death.

So you see how important the sartorial institution of the shirt is. It is indeed worthy of the movement which was started some years ago in the United States to collect the shirts of eminent men and keep them in a national museum. Prospective donors were requested to pin on their gifts "a short biography giving the famous occasions on which they have been intimately connected with your life."

Here is an excellent idea for our young men who are bitten by the collecting bug. They should begin, of course, with—*Mahatma Gandhi!*



III. THE PERFECT WIFE

THE quest for the Perfect Wife has continued from the time of Adam. But I must correct myself, for poor old Adam had obviously no choice in this matter. He had to take Eve or leave her and being rather a good fellow, he could not have possibly done the latter.

Having taken her, he was shrewd enough not to grouse or grumble. Adam knew how to put a good face on things—he did. With what astute foresight did he compose that bitter quarrel after Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit and he, too, had followed suit in the vehemence of his passion.

One would have given a lot for a verbatim report of that first quarrel between the first husband-and-wife. With what quiet serenity, even dignity, did Adam make his exit from Paradise hand in hand with the errant Eve—the cause of it all ! That by itself proves what a Perfect Husband he was,—one may even say, the Most Perfect Husband of all time.

It is strange indeed that while man is always trying to find that will-o'-the-wisp—the Perfect Wife—woman is content to seek just a husband. Now and

then a much-married Hollywood star may air her views on the Perfect Husband, but it is merely a theoretical discourse. Woman being more practical knows intuitively that there is no such thing as a Perfect Husband.

Husbands are just husbands ; how far they can be licked and groomed into perfection depends entirely upon the woman concerned. Her first job is to hold her man ; Let perfection take care of itself ! And as long as the hubby manages to keep his pockets reasonably jingling, his better half will not bother too much about his other imperfections.

No true daughter of Eve has ever believed in the myth of the Perfect Husband. She may occasionally yearn for the Perfect Lover, but she will never allow herself to be swept off her feet in search of the Perfect Husband. For between the Perfect Lover and the Perfect Husband lies a Pacific of difference.

But man, the perfect, congenital idiot, has always aspired to meet and marry the Perfect Wife. Every young puppy in his latter teens spends a good many hours day-dreaming about the Perfect Wife—*his* would-be-wife, that is to say. I may confess here in strict confidence that my own undergraduate folly had flowered into a whole epic on "The Woman I Want To Marry."

That literary relic of my adolescent asininity is yet with me. I pick it up whenever I am feeling particularly morose and fed-up—such occasions being none too rare in a bachelor's life !—and, believe me, it

has never failed to revive my spirits. Oh my Mona Lisa, My Own Dream-Wife... Charles Lamb was after all neither the first nor the last of the line of dreamers. For proof, cast your eyes on the nearest calf-lovers.

Lamb was a clever fellow and he remained a bachelor to the end of his life. His Perfect Wife was of the stuff that dreams are made on. That image had no relation to reality. He steered clear both of brass-tacks and banns and preferred to abide by his single blessedness rather than sail on the perilous seas of matrimony. He was that *rara avis*, a practical poet, a visionary with his feet firmly planted on earth. For him there could only be the Perfect Woman.

Every gay Lothario will tell you that the latest flame always shines the brightest! The goddess before whom one is engaged in burning incense for the time being always appears to be the perfection of femininity. So it is that there have been any number of Perfect Women in this world but precious few Perfect Wives. Indeed, every woman worth her lip-stick has, at least once in her life-time, worn the mantle of perfection in the eyes of her lover.

But then, alas! she was misguided enough (most of them are!) to go with him to the nearest altar. And soon the Perfect Woman finds that she has blossomed forth into The Very Imperfect Wife. The divine duckling is turned into the utterly commonplace goose. Such is the alchemy of matrimony!

Why?—one may well wonder. Because feminine perfection bears a close resemblance to the butterfly's

radiance. What may enchant the eyes at a distance turns into sheer dust when pressed with one's fingers : Perfection is not a quality that doth endure from day to day.

The idol which you once worshipped with all the ardour of your soul soon develops clay feet and a scorpion tongue. The "perfect woman nobly planned"



"Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives."

may learn quickly enough to henpeck you into a galley-slave. Did not that perfect cynic, the Duc De La Rochefoucauld, aptly remark : " You admire most in others' wives what you would hate most in your own ! " Which means that the sheep's eyes of your newly-wed, which sent you into such ecstasies but a few days ago, fail to fascinate you any longer, especially if they be absent-mindedly cast at your best friend !

Old Bard Shakespeare, too, was wise in his day when he made his Rosalind say : *Men are April when they woo, December when they wed ; Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives.* All this points to the fact that the Perfect Wife, like the Hare's Horns, simply does not exist !

But great is the vanity of humanity and immense its optimism. If the Perfect Wife cannot be born they are now out to manufacture one. There have lately sprung up in the United States a number of schools whose job it is to turn out Perfect Wives as fast as they can make them.

Courses are provided in cookery, cleaning, baby upbringing, dietetics, accounting, furnishing, nursing house-keeping, and last but not least, in husband holding. This last is naturally the main aim of it all. For though it may be comparatively easy to win you a man, it is another thing to keep him on the level. A little sex appeal is sufficient for the former but a lot of manipulation is necessary for the latter,

IV. SIGN OF THE CROSS

SHADES of Delilah and Mata Hari !

Uncle Sam must have surely got the jitters when he decided to banish all XXX from the U.S. mail.

It was one thing to send his FBI and G-men to round up all Nazis and other nasties, Wops and Japs, traitors and Fifth Columnists, suspected spies and likely saboteurs. After all the war must be won and America kept safe for the all-white democracy and the almighty dollar.

But to descend with a heavy hand upon those innocent XXX and to allow Mars to black-out Cupid himself—Cupid who has thrived on all other black-outs ! Surely this is carrying things too far. Nothing like this has been heard since the Pilgrim Fathers shook the dust of England off their feet.

It is a sheer throw-back to the frosty Puritan ancestors who frowned upon all love-making. It is a heavy encroachment not merely upon personal liberty but upon a fundamental human instinct.

XXX may be a mere shorthand sign for kisses but it comes out of a full heart. One can imagine the plight of the lonely and languishing sweethearts of

Park Avenue or the staid and buxom grass-widows of Texas who are suddenly forbidden to end their epistles with the customary XXX. One can visualise the disappointed looks of the Doughboys in the malarious swamps of the Solomons or the blazing inferno of Libya as they miss the fortifying cross in their beloved's infrequent letters.

That cross has now become a war casualty. For, forsooth, it is feared that it may be used as a code-



The cross has become a war casualty.

parties where the tea tasted like a decoction of mud and the cakes like a piece of sponge. Politeness compelled us to hold our tongues, but it would be only fair to forgive the scribe who has committed this grave solecism. One can visualise him tramping the town for his copy the whole of the hot summer noon and turning in, footsore and weary, for the last appointment of the day. He settles down on the nearest empty seat and gratefully picks up a cup of tea—only to set it down immediately!

The tea was *suspicious*—there was no doubt about it. And the cup that doth not cheer most certainly infuriates.

But only momentarily, for the philosopher that he was, our reporter soon found solace in the “Gold mohur” trees glowing a rich red in the rays of the setting sun...

That was a good touch—those “Gold-mohur” trees, and this lyrical piece will go down as a prized possession in my scrap-book. A. G. Gardiner has somewhere observed that you cannot enjoy the beauty of the sunset if you are thinking of the dinner that is awaiting you at home. Following this dictum our reporter was not apparently thinking of his dinner—possibly he was not sure that he would get a dinner at all! But he went on better and did not allow even the disappointment of the *suspicious* tea to cloud the glory of the “Gold-mohur” trees showing, etc. He merely notes his suspicion in a matter-of-fact way

word by spies and enemies, that a daughter of Mata Hari may elude the censor and convey military secrets by mere noughts and crosses,—those solitary crosses which so far stood for blissful kisses! The U.S. Postal authorities will, therefore, no longer carry any letter which contains the Sign of the Cross.

Uncle Sam has ponderously declared, of course, that he has nothing against kisses as such and that letters may be dripping with them provided that they are put in so many letters of the alphabet instead of a few XXX. This only reveals the typical blockhead of the bureaucrat. For lovers were always free to label their osculatory salutation as a kiss rather than as a X—censor or no censor. If they unanimously preferred to use the latter instead of the former, it must have been for very good reasons indeed.

A kiss sounds so blatant; a X looks so coy. Downright *Yours*, *With Many Kisses* takes things too much for granted; faintly scribbled XXX seem like conferring and at the same time beseeching a favour. A kiss is singular; kisses are plural; but X in the lover's vocabulary stands for infinity itself. And finally, as every gay Lothario knows, while a blunt kiss at the end of a letter may create presumptive evidence in a breach of matrimonial promise case a X wherever placed carries no commitment at all. It stands for everything—or nothing. Just nothing!

Was it for that that the X was first invented? Victorian maidens must have used it to escape the censorship of their lynx-eyed parents, while the buck

who flirted with them discreetly must have known that it kept them on the right side of the law as well as the altar. You know Mr. Punch's famous advice to those about to marry : *Don't !*

"Do the right and fear no man," said the moralist. *"Don't write and fear no woman,"* added the man about town. *"And if you must write,"* improved the chap who was reaping his wild oats, *"Don't put in your letter anything more compromising than a X !"*

That may or may not be the origin of the kiss-cross but the Washington ban is not going to mark the end either of the cross or the kiss. Both are sacred rituals of love—the advances of youth and the acknowledgments of age.

The kiss has sealed many a vow but the cross has carried many a promise. Between the two the latter is easily the more important. For every Romeo hazards a tentative cross in his letters before daring to imprint the first indistinct kiss on the person of his Juliet.

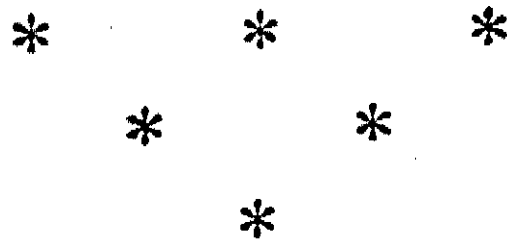
No pressing military necessity, no bounding censorial stupidity is going to take away the XXX from the American Eve. She has borne many a cross in the interest of the nation. She has uncomplainingly suffered the loss of silk stockings from her legs and of the rubber tyres from her auto. She has bidden a brave farewell to her boy-friend departing for unknown, distant lands. All this she has done for Uncle Sam, for the Stars and Stripes, for the God's Own Country.

But surely it is asking too much of a poor, lonely

girl to give up her kiss-cross. That is a cross she can't bear, against which she must protest with all the ardour in her soul, with all the appeal in her wilting lips.

No Crosses For Kisses! may be an easy law to put on the American statute book but it will not be half so easy to keep out the crosses from the American mail. After all history teaches us that kisses have always defied all rules and regulations, all bans and *verbodens*. So will the crosses, too.

There may be a kiss-proof lip-stick—I have to come across one yet!—but there can never be a cross-proof love-letter. The censorious Uncle Sam will soon find it out!



V. TELLING THE TRUTH

“THE guests were treated to a *suspicious* tea in a pavilion on the spacious lawns of the club and spent a pleasant hour together, while beyond the lawn the “Gold-mohur” trees glowed a rich red in the rays of the setting sun.”

My hat off to the very truthful scribe who has done this brilliant piece of reporting. It is only once in a while that we come across such gems of journalistic description.

Journalism, like any other profession, is full of its conventions and make-believes, its little shams and hypocrisies. Especially in the social sphere the newspaperman is the very soul of courtesy and kindness. He never lets down his hosts (whom as often as not he has gate-crashed) and whether he is reporting a marriage or a funeral, he will have the well-chosen word and the appropriate adjective for everybody and everything. He is the master of the *mot juste*.

But there are occasions when body and soul cannot bear it any longer. Even a worm turns, it is said, and our reporter must be excused if he has blurted out the truth for once. All of us have attended

parties where the tea tasted like a decoction of mud and the cakes like a piece of sponge. Politeness compelled us to hold our tongues, but it would be only fair to forgive the scribe who has committed this grave solecism. One can visualise him tramping the town for his copy the whole of the hot summer noon and turning in, footsore and weary, for the last appointment of the day. He settles down on the nearest empty seat and gratefully picks up a cup of tea—only to set it down immediately!

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Reporting is a rum job.

and without prejudice, as the lawyers say, and proceeds to look beyond the lawns.

(By the way, do not tempt me to divulge the names of the reporter, the paper or the party concerned. They shall not pass my lips—though I hope that hosts and hostesses will take timely heed from this incident.)

Reporting is a rum job, as its votaries and victims alike are aware. It has its thrills and triumphs, its pitfalls and law-suits. The tyro who enters this profession soon learns to protect his skin by the free use of the magic word “alleged,” though at times even that can be overdone, as the fate of the chap who referred to Lady D—— as “the alleged wife of Lord D——” proves.

There are fashions in reporting as in any other line and the modern tendency is towards a stark surrealism. In the United States, however, the old method of putting it thick with a trowel still persists side by side with the new vogue as the following illustrations will show. Here is a report of a wedding according to the old style :

“The bride is a woman of wonderful fascination and remarkable attractiveness, for with a manner as enchanting as the wand of a siren, and a disposition as sweet as the colours of flowers, and a spirit as joyous as the carolling of birds, and a mind as brilliant as the glittering tresses that adorn the brow of winter, and with a heart as pure as the dew-drops trembling in a coronet of violets, she will make the home of her husband a paradise of enchantment, where the heaven-tuned harp of hymen shall send forth those sweet strains of felicity that thrill the sense with the ecstatic pulsing of rhythmic rapture.”

Now take a deep breath and read the following description of another wedding in the surrealist style. The astute scribe, it will be noticed, focuses the spotlight not upon the bride as in the preceding example but mainly upon her opposite, as more likely to survive the shock :

“The house was newly plastered for the wedding and the exterior painted, thus appropriately carrying out the decorative scheme—

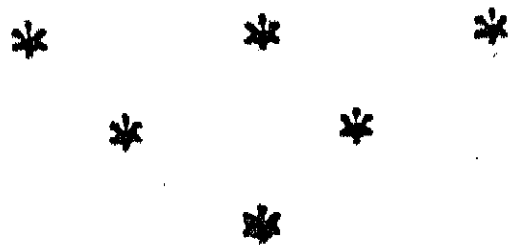
for the 'groom was newly plastered and the bride newly painted.

"The 'groom wore a rented dinner suit over athletic underwear of imitation silk. His pants were held up by pale-green suspenders. His No. 8 patent leather shoes matched his state in tightness and harmonised nicely with the axle-grease of his hair. He carried a pocket-knife, a bunch of keys, a dun for the ring—and his usual look of imbecility.

"The young people will make their home with the bride's parents, which means they will sponge on the old man until he dies and then she will take the washing."

To this was appended the following befitting post-script by the Editor :

This may be the last issue of this newspaper, but my life's ambition has been to write up one wedding and tell the truth. Now that it is done, death can have no sting!



VI. SAVE US OUR TITLES!

TUESDAY, January 18, 1938, will go down as a Black Tuesday in the annals of the Bombay Presidency. On that day the Bombay Legislative Assembly passed the resolution recommending the abolition of the long established and deeply cherished institution of honours and titles.

I consider this to be one of the heaviest blows which the British Raj has received since the happenings of 1857.

To me it verily betokens the beginning of the end. This most deplorable lead given by the white-capped cohorts in the Bombay Legislative Assembly will surely be followed by their confreres in other Congress provinces. This contagion may indeed spread all over the country and soon India will be denuded of its Knights and the other faithful, who treasure the various decorations from the Kasier-I-Hind Bronze Medal (third class) to the Grand Cross of the Indian Empire on their loyal breasts. And with the final eclipse of those satellites, what will happen to the glory of the Raj?

Even if any one of my readers demurs to the

remark that Tuesday, January 18, will be remembered as a Black Tuesday, I may at any rate assert that it will end the two annual Red Letter Days—the New Year Day and the King's Birthday.

With what lively anticipation and with what keen expectation are these two days looked forward to



Never does a school-boy peruse the result-sheet with more anxiety.

at present ! With what trembling hands does the Title Hunter open the morning paper and with what soulful eyes does he scan the Honours List !

Never does a school-boy peruse the result-sheet with more anxiety ; never does a punter who has put his shirt on his favourite follow the progress of the race with a louder pounding in his heart ; never does a lover strain his eyes with keener longing for the sight of his beloved.

Hope springs eternal. Our Title Hunter begins at the top. He may leave out the G.C.I.E.s and the K.C.I.E.s as the patrimony of the Princes and of the Viceroy's Executive Councillors, but thoroughly confident of his merits and fully conscious of the faithful services rendered to the official gods as he is, he does not at all consider a Knighthood as beyond his reach. He may be disappointed as is generally the case. But still all is not lost, as the Fallen Archangel said.

And so lower down the honours' hierarchy T. H. goes with increasing eagerness and also with an accentuated feeling of sinking in the region of his stomach. "Have I missed the bus again ?" he asks in panic as he approaches the bottom. But No ! Glory be to the Lord !

Here is my name in black and white in the list of the Rao Sahebs ! One naturally feels a temporary spasm of disappointment, as the least one expected was a Rao Bahadurship. However, better luck next time. Anyway here am I with a prefix distinguishing me from the common herd,

It is a moment of reincarnation. Our T. H. is verily born again with a new handle to his name and a new dignity in his soul. There is an air of buoyancy, of elation ; for the first few days at least he almost walks on air. His chin goes perceptibly up.

When he hears himself hailed for the first time as "Rao Saheb", he forgets all the travail and the shoemaker's bills, which he had to suffer and pay while in the running for a title. His friends arrange parties in his honour ; his wife dares not nag him any longer ; even the family cat looks at the new Rao Saheb with an unaccustomed awe.

In due time the invitation for the *Durbar* arrives. The successful T. H. runs to his tailor and orders a new suit of the prescribed cloth, colour and cut. With all the flutter of a debutante attending her first court, he takes lessons in deportment from those who have already passed through the sweet ordeal.

And what a Day of Days it is when he goes to the *Durbar* and receives the insignia of the title from the hand of the representative of the King-Emperor himself. Gratitude wells up from his heart... "God Save The King !" he cries, "and let Him save the District Collector, too, who recommended my name. *Long Live the Ma-Bap British Sarkar !*"

Receiving the Rao Sahebship is not the end but only the beginning of the Odyssey. It opens new vistas of immense possibilities, unending avenues of preferment from the King's Birthday to the next New Year Day. It is a long, long trail from a Rao Sahebship to

a Knighthood but it draws out the best that is in the T. H.

The vision of Valhalla sustains the flagging spirit of one who single-mindedly pursues the objective regardless of the expense and effort involved. Lesser mortals well may quail at the prospect but our man with the mission holds on. Who said *Excelsior*?

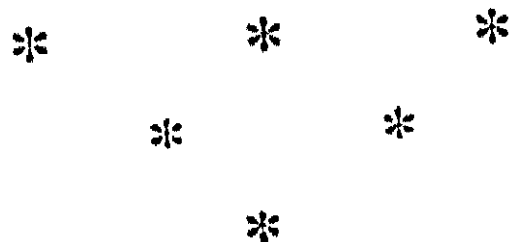
Fawning on local officials, arranging parties and receptions when the Big Bugs visit the town, giving donations to strictly approved charities, presenting loyal addresses on proper occasions, attending the civilian *Tamashas* and military parades—the conscientious aspirant to honours has a hundred and on things to do.

He is one of the most industrious members of society and to call his pursuits parasitical is to do him a grave injustice. The abolition of titles will only result in the loss of the primary occupation of this tribe and thus accentuate the problem of unemployment in the country.

I submit, therefore, that the Bombay Congress Cabinet has taken too narrow a view of the situation. Democracy is no doubt good in its own way, but so are titles in theirs. Nor do they militate against its principles. Much less is there any danger to the new Congress Raj from the titled gentry. *Semper Fidelis* is their motto and I have no doubt whatever that those pillars of the British Empire will very willingly transfer their solid support to the Congress—as long as it is in power! If the Congress does not

relish the old titles, let it coin new ones. But save us our titles.

What is in a name after all ? One title is as good as another as long as it distinguishes us from our fellow-creatures and thus satisfies a deep-seated human instinct—Vanity ! Public life will be infinitely “weary, stale, flat and unprofitable” if shorn of the glamour of a suffix or a prefix. *Service for Service’s Sake* may be an excellent motto. But certainly it is not in the least dishonourable to hanker for a little recognition of one’s service. And a title, like mercy, blesseth him that gives and him that takes—the Prime Minister of Bombay is, I hope, aware of the famous war-chest of Mr. Lloyd George !



VII. LEGS & LEGENDS

A STRIKING observation I came across recently was regarding one of the stellar inhabitants of Hollywood. A scribe, who was waxing eloquent over his screen idol, abruptly ended his panegyric on the inspired note that her legs had already become legends. This, he probably felt, was the high-water-mark of homage, the very limit of eulogy.

The compliment is obviously as original as it is graceful. We have read of Helen of Troy whose "face launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium." Other members of the human body have also received their due meed of praise. Poets have always revelled in the lyrical descriptions of their beloved's anatomy. Eyes throughout the ages have been stars and lips have ever looked like rose-buds.

From Homer to my neighbour who pesters me every morning with his "yesternight's inspiration"—all have been using the same picturesque phraseology, and re-inventing the identical imagery, with merely the change of a mole here or a dimple there. But legs have so far remained mostly a poetic *terra incognita*. Even T. Lodge, who with his medieval freedom dwelt

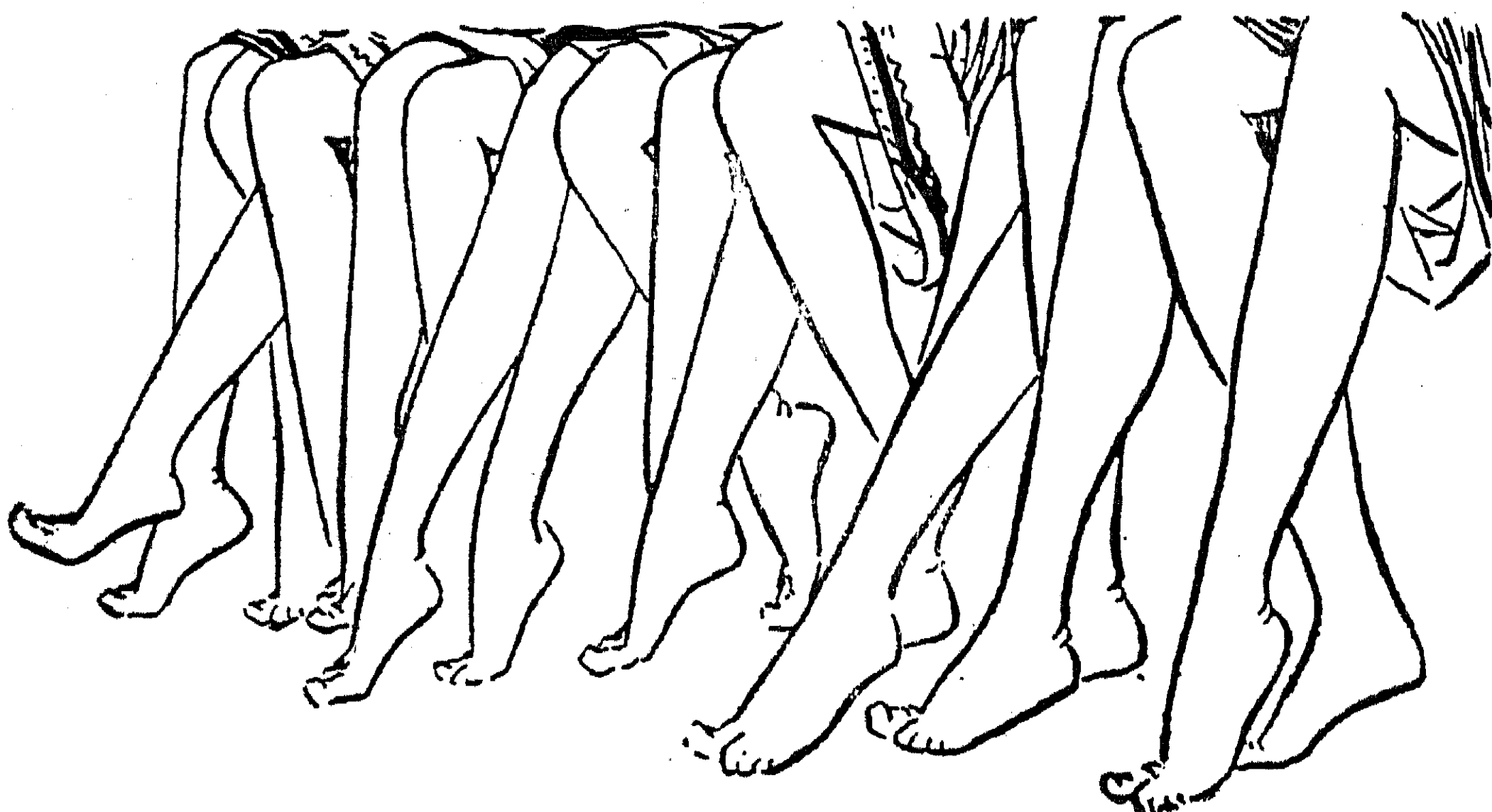
upon his Rosaline's "paps and breasts," drew the line at legs.

This reticence was very natural considering that legs had been, until lately, scrupulously shielded from the vulgar gaze by means of ample skirts and flowing *sarries*. For centuries they eluded the glances of their admirers and ever remained a thing of ineffable charm and infinite mystery.

No wonder that when the first high-kick went up from the hooped petticoat in the naughty nineties, every masculine heart in Europe went pit-a-pat! Paris, where this sensation was first witnessed, became the very Mecca of tourists and the Folies Bergere, who specialised in this dare-devilry, the toast of a continent.

Legs have defied description since humanity emerged from its nature-suit stage. One may even say that legs receded as civilization proceeded until in the heyday of Victorianism, they became a mere anatomical detail, which was discreetly recognised but neither vulgarly revealed nor even mentioned in cultured conversation. It was necessary for the Great War to intervene before legs became a really acknowledged feature of the feminine form. The progress they have made during the last score of years is, nevertheless, amazing.

From mystery they have passed into history and instead of being mere leg-ends, they have become legends today! The credit for the metamorphosis naturally goes to our modern love of hiking and to the



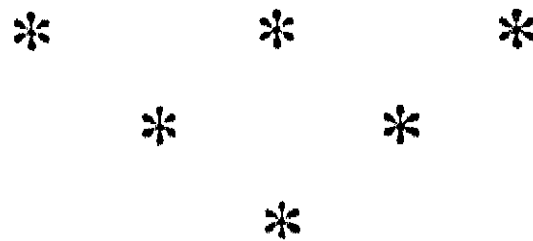
From mystery they have passed into history.

influence of Hollywood. It is the silver screen, however, which has really immortalised legs and apotheosized them as legends. Nor is the significance attached to them at present at all undeserved. It is strictly commensurate with their importance.

George Meredith, the master of character delineation, has summed up the hero of his *Egoist* in one simple phrase : "*You see he has a leg.*" The young Sir Willoughby, we are told, "*had a leg as Cicero had a tongue. It is a lute to scatter songs to his mistress : a rapier, is she obdurate. In sooth, a leg with brains in it, soul.*"

The leg, then, which has served as the "open sesame" of Meredith's masterpiece, is truly worthy of passing into legend and all honour therefore to the star who has brought about this noble consummation. In case any of my readers is anxious to know the name

of the owner of these legendary legs, I may as well say that she is none else than La Dietrich, who happens to be *my* Hollywood legend also in spite of, shall I add, her last few pictures in which she is all legs and no legend !



VIII. THANK YOU, CITY FATHERS!

STUDENTS of Sanskrit are conversant with the famous passage in which the grammarian Panini lumps together, while commenting on a rule of declension, Dogs, Youths and the God Indra.

This egregious misjoinder, which has been quoted for centuries as a classic example of "How not to do it," has now been rivalled by the Bombay Municipal Corporation in the assessment schedule prepared for the proposed tax on Trades and Professions. Among the various groups liable to the new impost are bracketed together editors, sculptors and fortune-tellers!

No wonder that this proposal, apart from its general unpopularity, is being unanimously and vigorously assailed by the press of Bombay. To the very human reluctance to pay any kind of tax at all, is now added this gratuitous outrage on the editorial dignity: Editors, sculptors and, aye,—fortune-tellers. Indeed!

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So long the editors, every Tom, Dick and Harry of them, considered themselves the cocks of the world's walks. They share with Royalty the first person

plural. But while the latter is a fast-dwindling race, the former is an ever-growing fraternity. From their sanctums sanctorums they survey the world from China to Peru and give the distilled essence of their learning and labours to an ungrateful world every morning. The editors are always at your service with the unfailing regularity of the sun.

They are the modern Solomons who dispense justice right and left. Like the Jestling Pilate they ask "What is Truth?" but unlike the J. P. they provide their own elaborate answers in every conceivable case. War and peace, not to talk of a mere armistice ; kings and comets ; births and deaths ; earthquakes and epidemics ; disputes—social, political communal, marital—everything is grist to their mill.

When they are hard pressed for a topic of comment, they even pull each other's hair and wash each other's dirty linen for public delectation. They have, nevertheless, their own venerable traditions ; not for them the plebian way of calling each other by name even though they fling plenty of choice names at each other's head. The editor of the Tweedledum Street Journal will always address his rival as "Our Contemporary of Tweedledee Street" and *vice versa*.

The Press, as Kipling said, is the king over all children of pride and the truth of this dictum is exemplified by men like Barnes, Delaine and Scott. The editor is the high priest of the press whose liberty is the palladium of all civil, political and religious liberties of a citizen. He is the modern king-maker

So as a general proposition one can safely assert that it is a very doubtful privilege to have a baby in these enlightened times. No more do our friends hail us as little heroes or rush upon us with presents. Many will nod gravely ; some I will scowl ; a few will get unduly confidential with us. Occasionally even the gifts sent by some of those practical fellows are contrived to bring home to us the enormity of our guilt, till one is almost driven into echoing Macbeth's cry of repentance : *Will all great Neptune's ocean . . .*

The business of babyhood, the prospects of parenthood and the future of the race are nevertheless not so dark as some would have us believe. For due to an inexplicable kink in human nature, we are to-day witnessing the apparent paradox of a world, which is none too favourably disposed towards a baby, positively going into transports of joy over a batch of them. The old adage "Unity is strength" is to-day exemplified in an unexpected direction.

A baby by itself is tolerated as a necessity. When two of them come hand in hand, they force the tribute of passing attention. A triplet is quoted as a curiosity. A quadruplet makes mankind sit up and treat them as a star turn,—witness the publicity given to the four new-born babies of St. Neots. But when they come in a force of five, the world verily goes into hysterics over them ! The Dionne Quintuplets of Canada are today THE Five Marvels of the world. The old 'Seven Wonders' pale into insignificance before them.

The five sisters who were simultaneously ushered into an unsuspecting world are really the cutest of cutes. They must have had a real hot brain-wave while they were at the back of the Beyond. Knowing that a poor, solitary girl has no ghost of a chance in those hard days, they pooled their future fortunes and formed themselves into a Corporation as it were before being transported to this *terra firma*. No wonder the whole batch of them is providing the biggest ballyhoo of modern times !

Even princesses born in purple may well envy those five wee specimens of femineity. They are treated with the greatest care and devotion, are attended by a specially selected staff of nurses, and are protected even against their own parents ! They are housed in a hospital all their own, presided over by Dr. Dafoe, who has already become a legendary figure in obstetrical annals. He is not only their great harbinger in this life but their guardian and god-father, almost a dictator. His slightest word is law as far as the lucky quintuplets are concerned. He is being bombarded for information regarding his precious charge from all over the world, the inquiries running into astronomical figures.

Though they have not yet come to the age of being feted and feasted, these illustrious infants have already amassed in their own right fortunes which would be the despair of many grown-ups. A roaring trade is done in their souvenirs and various gifts, legacies and bequests are being daily showered upon

them from far and near. They are even billed to make their first appearance on the silver screen for a fee which will make stars in Hollywood or Elstree green with jealousy. It is reported that the world's ex-sweetheart, Mary Pickford herself, is going to be their film director.

But while the Quins are living and gurgling with delight in distant Canada, a battle royal is being fought over them between two doctors in London. That babies who come in batches are better off than the unfortunate, solitary arrivals and that the quads and quins are supremely fortunate through sheer numerical strength, are propositions in the Q.E.D. stage now.

But what about the mothers? That is the bone of contention between the two good medicos. One of them holds that multiple births are not good for the mother. It is a throwback to the primitive—this litter. It is not a good omen for the future of the race either, he asserts. The other worthy doctor holds a directly contradictory view. "The more, the merrier" is the slogan. But his argument is so delightfully naive that I cannot resist the temptation of quoting it here in full. Says he: "If you have one child, you have to leave the washing or the housework to see what is going on. If you have twins, you tell one of them to go and see what his brother is doing, and tell him he mustn't. If you have quadruplets you can, it seems, rest in comfortable ease for the



...the shabbiest trick ever played by God Almighty !

rest of your life in the assurance that all your problems will be solved !”

And what of the fathers ? We may take the inquiry one step further and ask. It is characteristic of the present times that while columns and columns of newspapers are being devoted to the Dionne babies, to their marvellous mother, to their good doctor, and even to their nice nurses, not a word is being said



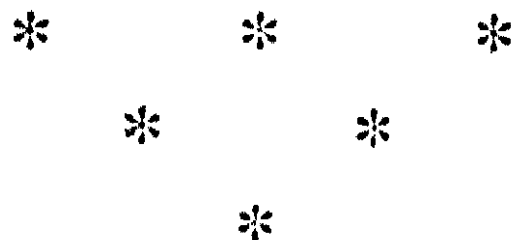
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about their unfortunate father. His very existence is being ignored ; he is for all that matters simply *non est* !

It is really the height of irony, the limit of injustice. The father's view-point is naturally of cardinal importance—at any rate to himself ! His batch of babies may provide a nine days' sensation to the world but to him it is, well, a long liability, to say the least. And most fathers will, I presume, heartily endorse the remark blurted out by one of them on learning that he was blessed with a triplet, that it was the shabbiest trick ever played by God Almighty upon him !



X. A QUESTION OF COINS

ONE of the greatest handicaps I suffer from is the inability to distinguish between good and bad coins.

Try as I may, I have never been able to learn the art of spotting the spurious number and as a result of this ineradicable drawback, I frequently find myself burdened with an anna or a rupee which nobody else accepts. I daresay there must be worse mugs than myself, but the blokes I have generally to deal with have too shrewd an eye to accept the damaged goods which I try to palm off on them. How marvellously clever they are ! Just a glance and a twirl with the thumb and the index finger and there is your coin back—*This won't do, Sir !*

The tram and bus conductors are my greatest enemies in this respect. It is with the utmost impunity that they offer you as change the baldest anna, or what looks like the first rupee minted in John Company's reign. It has lost its colour and its timbre and its surface is as smooth as that of a billiard ball. Nevertheless they assure you that it is quite *Achcha*, and anyway that is all the change they have got.



The bus conductors are my greatest enemies.

Take it or leave it—and if it is the latter, get out! So you have to pocket it against your better judgment and thus continue the journey.

But try to pass that same rupee to another member of the tribe. He will look critically at it and suspiciously at you. He will strike it repeatedly against his steel-box. No! It does not ring all right. You assure him that to your ears it does and that after all it was given to you by one of their gang only half an hour ago. Then he generally calls his mate for a consultation and both of them duly and unanimously

it to be dud. There is nothing left for you to bow to the judgment of the tribunal and for another coin.

Having reached your destination, you leave the Pan-wallah with hatred in your heart for the whole tribe of Pan-wallahs and bus conductors and—what is worse—a whole rupee in your pocket! I for one never feel satisfied unless and until I have disposed of that condemned coin. So you approach the nearest Pan-wallah though you may abhor chewing his stuff. You pass on that rupee and try to appear as casual as possible, even as your conscience is making you feel guilty.

You await the change, which you soon find forthcoming. The *Pan-wallah* is very polite and very firm. So you give him another coin and he lets you to enter the nearest restaurant.

As you sit gingerly sipping the tea or the soda which you have ordered, you ruminate over the general degeneracy of humanity. You curse and kick yourself for drinking a mug. You abuse the Government for allowing such coins to be in circulation. You decide to write a strong "Letter To The Editor" about it. As your mental vista is thus clouded with ugly thoughts, the waiter comes and collects your cup and saucer.

You get up and approach the paying counter. You select the cheapest cigarette packet—and casually feel for that skeleton in the pocket. But even while you are lighting your fag, you hear by now the faint clink sound. No, it does not ring all right...you

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have not even the moral courage to argue about it any longer. And so, crest-fallen, you return to your digs—the worse off by a number of good annas in trying to negotiate that bad rupee.

In days gone by, when I was younger and not so worldly-wise, I took the matter more sportingly. Far from being anxious to rid myself of such coins, I had decided to form a collection of those specimens of spurious currency. That original museum, however, grew more rapidly than I had thought possible and soon I found that I had invested more money in this business than I could afford.

I decided, therefore, to liquidate my collection, though it was a wrench to part from the conglomeration of coins ranging from the spick and span to those badly bruised and battered. (There was, however, a four-anna piece with a hole neatly punched in the middle, which I decided to preserve as a supreme tribute to my gullibility). I had in those unsophisticated days a firm belief that a Government office was bound to accept whatever coin one offered, as long as it bore the effigy of the King or the Queen.

I therefore decided to augment my Postal Savings Bank deposit, which had remained stationary ever since it was opened in the first flush of a Boy Scout's thrift. Like an innocent abroad I went to the Post Office and delivered my precious collection to the old Post Master with whom I had a nodding acquaintance. As he began to examine one piece after another, found his mien assuming more and more the character

of a question mark. A frown had spread over his face ere he had finished his close scrutiny, and when in a hoarse voice he beckoned me into his inner sanctum, I was prepared for the worst.

Without any attempt to be polite, he informed me that as a Government servant it was his duty to hand me over to the police for possessing so many counterfeit coins ; but that as he knew me, and moreover as he also knew my late father (whom I had disgraced by such conduct) he did not want to ruin my life. So if I had any sense, I would scam...and scam, needless to add, I did, without so much as asking what he proposed to do with my hard-earned hoard !

Since then, I never keep a suspicious coin with me a moment longer than I can help it. I have often made perfectly unnecessary purchases in my ardent anxiety to dispose a dud and damned rupee. I have trekked from one end of the town to another in trying to pass off that evil acquisition, and though I generally have had to spend more than the actual value of the coin concerned in this process of disposal, there is in the end the supreme satisfaction of having discovered a more thick-headed mug than myself. It is a spiritual solace which amply recompenses me for my lack of discrimination in this field !

Naturally I have perfected a technique of my own in this affair. The secret of its success lies, firstly, in appearing extremely casual, and secondly (after the coin has been refused) in assuming an air of injured,

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even outraged innocence. You show as if it was the first time that you were enlightened about the non-genuineness of that beastly bit, and what a shame it really was ! And so you pass to the next shop-keeper and enact your little piece again.

I hope I shall not be accused of having landed upon too trivial a subject. Far from being trivial, it is a moral, legal and practical issue—this Question of Coins. Most of my readers must be aware—or ought to be—that it is positively unlawful to pass on a coin which we know to be counterfeit. How many of us desist from doing so and destroy the coin forthwith ?

We assure ourselves that it may be illegal but is certainly not immoral. After all we are only a passing carrier of this victimization. The original sin was not ours. But is this not compromising with the straight and narrow path of honesty ? On the other hand, is one to allow oneself to be forever duped and defrauded ? . .

However, I do not propose to moralise here on this topic, much less to offer any precepts for anybody's guidance. You know by now what I practice !

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XI. GOOD-BYE! JOHNNIE WALKER*

JOHNNIE WALKER, born 1820—still going strong, will go strong no longer. Guinness will be no more good for you or me....

A pall of parting hangs over the first city of India to-day and although I cannot claim personal acquaintance with Johnnie Walker, I share the widespread feeling of sorrow over his departure.

Being born in an orthodox Brahmin family, liquor was strictly taboo to us in our young days. My life may have run on heterodox lines for a good few years now but I am still unable to appreciate the alcoholic treats which kind friends sometimes force upon me.

Initial lack of opportunity and subsequent inability to cultivate a taste for liquor does not, however, mean that I condemn it outright as the drink of the devil. Prohibition is no doubt right in its own way. So also, I'm afraid, is liquor, though personally I may not relish it at all. I can easily pose as a moralist, as a conscientious teetotaller, as a prohibition protagonist

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and what not ? But just because I am a non-drinker and would always prefer a cup of *aqua pura* to a glass of *aqua vitae*, I feel I must say a word in favour of the latter. That might be a bad bold thing to do in the Congress Raj, but I cannot help shedding a few tears when Johnnie Walker, born 1820—still going strong, is given marching orders from our midst.

Good old Johnnie Walker ! What a perfect Regency buck he is—with cane, monocle and all. What a swagger he has got. What mastery of aroma, what quintessence of the distiller's art. Mature and mellow, he remains ever young and fresh.

Borrowing the words addressed by the poet to the maid, I may say that to see him was to love him. That virile, upright figure, yet going strong in spite of its 119 summers, creates in us a feeling of affectionate regard, adds indirectly to our own zest of living. It is a living precept to us to go strong howsoever heavy the burden, howsoever weary the limbs, howsoever endless the way.

I may be constitutionally incapable of appreciating the bouquet of a good wine, but that makes me all the more conscious of the fact that from the time of Valmiki and Virgil, poets and philosophers have been paying their fervent homage to what they held as earthly nectar.

The Greeks had consecrated a special deity *Bacchus* in honour of wine and it is well-known that our own gods and goddesses, too, freely indulged in *Soma*, which was nothing but a celestial brand of

liquor—*their* Johnnie Walker, perhaps ! Christians and Parsis require wine for sacramental purposes. It is only Islam which frowns uncompromisingly upon drink.

But was it not a great Muslim himself, Omar Khayyam of Naishapur—poet, philosopher, astronomer and wine-lover—who wrote the finest lyric in any language in praise of the Ruby Vintage ? The Daughter of the Vine, immortal herself, is doubly immortalised through the *Rubaiyat*. What lover either of Bacchus or the Muses can refuse Omar's invitation :

*Come, fill the Cup and in the Fire of Spring
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling :
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly—and lo ! The Bird is already on the Wing.*

Fill the Cup—ah, I cannot ! But I can feel its flavour, enjoy its delicate bouquet, surrender myself to its sparkle all the same...do so not through the gross medium of physical senses, but through intellectual intuition. I can approach Bacchus through the Muse and improvise after Keats :

*Drunk wines are sweet—
But those undrunk are sweeter...*

Why is it that wine is always coupled with woman ? Is it because as a beautiful woman personifies nature at its best, so does wine represent man's creative power at its highest ? Has not Tennyson sung of wines "which had sucked the fire of some forgotten sun and kept it thro' a hundred years of

gloom"—purely through human alchemy? The old music-hall ditty spoke of:

Wine, Woman and Song

Three things that send a man wrong.



Farewell! Old friend, and may you go strong for ever!

Byron would have none of this deprecatory mood. In *Don Juan* he boldly gives expression to his faith :

*Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter
Sermons and soda-water, the day after.*

The shrewd reader will note that in all the passages I have cited, the wine always precedes the woman. This must be so because (following Kipling's cliché) a woman is only a woman, but a wine is a drink. Old, wise, wine-loving Omar knew this aright. He would no doubt prefer his Beloved to fill the Cup—

*The Cup that clears
To-day of past regrets and future fears.*

But what really mattered was the Cup—and *not* the Beloved !

A good wine, said Shakespeare, needs no bush. But a good whisky certainly deserves a warm farewell...

Good-bye ! Johnnie Walker. I had not the privilege of friendship with you. None-the-less it did me a world of good to see your cheerful, sprightly self—born 1820, still going strong—every morning as I opened my paper. It was a call to me, too, to go strong...

Farewell, old friend, and may you go strong for ever !

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XII. PURGE OF GHOSTS

DO you believe in ghosts, or don't you ? Were you, or were you not, regaled with stories of ghosts and ghouls in your nursery days ? Have their impressions remained with you yet ? Have you as an adult devoted any thought to this subject ?

I have. And as a result of this I have become a profound disbeliever in the denizens of darkness. My spiritualist friends have tried their best to convince me of the continued existence of those that have passed away. They assure me that they are yet living in the Beyond ; that the ether is full of them ; and that they are watching us day and night. I have been given heaps of literature on the subject and even photographs of spirits. But when a very earnest person offered me once to show a ghost in person (if they have a person) I firmly refused. The reason ?

Because, strictly between you and me, though I do not believe in ghosts, I am afraid of them ! I pride myself upon being a rationalist ; I am emphatic that such phantoms are pure myths. But I draw the line at meeting them face to face...even if the chance be one to a billion !



Though I do not believe in ghosts, I'm afraid of them.

Ghosts, indeed, are my weak point, though I am intellectually convinced that there can be no such thing as a ghost. The impressions I received during my childhood have become a part and parcel of my being. Deep down my subconscious, ghosts are very much alive—ghosts and satyrs and fauns, spooks and vampires and poltergeists. I may deny and denounce and deride them during the day time ; but when the

versa. Nobody knows who will sabotage what or to whom the purge will apply when. Even the most fervent admirers of the Bolsheviks are wondering where it is all leading to and whether their faith can stand any more of those terroristic treats. While one hears little of the Hammer, the Sickle seems to be over-busy—in cutting down human necks !

In spite of this, however, I feel that the priest and teacher in Kirghiz who were sentenced to death for telling ghost stories to children richly deserved their fate. For were they not, as the official charge put it, “corrupting their morals ?” The connection between ghostlore and morals may not be apparent to the bourgeoisie intellect. But there is no gainsaying the fact that ghosts, much more than conscience, make cowards of us all—as I can testify from my own example.

I suppose even my worst enemies would not accuse me of being a coward ; but talk to me of ghosts on a dark night in a lonely place, and you will find in me the most craven, chicken-hearted, white-livered poltroon that was ever born. That night will be a night of terror to me ; all the gruesome images of ghostly doings, which were imprinted upon my brain, will leap to life. I shall suffer the most terrible nightmares and the most excruciating agonies. Not till the next day’s sun rises shall I return to peace and sanity. And all because some fools “corrupted my morals” (in the expressive Russian phrase) while I was yet in my swaddling clothes.

I am convinced, therefore, that ghosts, whether in Russia or elsewhere, must be "liquidated." And paradoxical as it may appear, they can be liquidated merely by not talking about them—at least not within the range of juvenile ears. As a friend put it—"Soviet Russia is confident that what is not talked about will not be seen, and that ghosts have only to be ignored for nothing to go bumpety-bump in the night."

Some people may find in the fate meted out to those story-tellers only one more demonstration of the Red Terror ; others may wax facetious and indulge in some leg-pulling of the Russian dictator. I for one, however, consider the present purge to be one of the finest things that good old Stalin has done. Let us by all means keep the Children's Front free from such saboteurs and purveyors of Old Wives' Tales.

One only hopes that the disembodied spirits of the priest and the teacher will not one night haunt Stalin himself...

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XIII. ONIONS & OPINIONS

I AM going to sing a paeon of the onion. Turn not your noses, fair ladies and fastidious gents. Your professed revulsion to this most virtuous vegetable has something Victorian if not psuedo-Puritan about it.

There is so much hypocrisy and so much cant bound up with the orthodox opinions on onion, that it were time that someone stood up for this victim of unthinking bigotry. Many women have a horror not only of onions but also of onion-users. Its use, especially in the raw, is considered uncultured, even Pagan. It is strictly taboo on many a society table. Particularly in this country, its defiant smell is supposed to militate against the insidious odour of sanctity which certain people are anxious to spread around them. In the South no devout Hindu will touch this innocent bulb during four months of the year, its indulgence being perpetually forbidden to widows and priests !

It was not always thus. Thousands of years ago the Egyptians venerated the onion as a very deity and partook of it only after due ceremonial. They considered it a special gift of the Gods and worshipped

it with solemnity as a member of the celestial lotus family. One can now perhaps realise why civilisation flourished so early in the land of the Nile and why the Pharaohs became such mighty monarchs.

There is no doubt whatever that the Egyptians have thrived upon the onion, which even to-day is their staple crop and plays a large part in their national economy. A bridge in Egypt was recently built on



*A succession of Roman generals lost their hearts to
Cleopatra...*

onions as it were, a large part of the bill of the engineers being settled by the consignment of onions. This was not the first deal of its type for in 1935, when Egypt purchased its stately Embassy building in Berlin from the Reich Government, the payment was made entirely in onions.

Homer sings of the onion as the food of heroes. The mighty Alexander insisted on his legions freely partaking of the onion to make them virile and victorious. A succession of Roman generals lost their hearts and heads to Cleopatra, though they managed in the end to wrest the secret of her siren spell, which was neither the pearls in her cocktail nor the ass's milk in her bath, but—the onions on her table! The Romans gave a word of adoration to it—*Unio*, meaning one—from which, philologists will tell you, the English "onion" is derived. It was the spontaneous tribute to the perfect symmetry of its shape and to the supreme sustenance it gave.

Sustenance not merely for your body but also for your mind, nay, for your very soul. The onion is well-known throughout the ages as an intellectual pabulum. It no doubt fills your belly but it also stimulates your brain. That is why all creative authors and artists have sworn by the onion, though one must ruefully admit that its comparative cheapness is also one of the main factors which counted with these authors and artists—creative and otherwise.

Among its greatest devotees may be mentioned Balzac, who, apart from his great literary attainments,

deserves to be known as the greatest champion of the onion cult.

He ate onions for his breakfast ; he ate them again at his lunch ; and rounded his dinner with a special dish of onions. The story is told of a party he gave in his country house to which had been invited a number of literary celebrities including Theophile Gautier, for the purpose of reading to them a part of one of Balzac's latest books. Over the dessert Gautier observed :

"They seem to have put onion in everything, or do I dream ?"

"You do not," retorted his host, "I had them do that in readiness for the reading. I want to hear your sound judgment. I have made decisive experiments with the onion. There is no food more propitious to the mind. It renders the mind subtle ; it puts to flight base notions and prejudices."

While that no doubt is true, it is extremely remarkable that the onion itself is the object of many violent prejudices. You either adore it or abhor it. It is full-blooded food—there is no pinkness about it. Even the humblest, most henpecked of men has an opinion of his own on this subject. The onion by its very nature makes you take sides, though you might be spineless as a jellyfish and dumb as an oyster. Nor is there any question of keeping your views to yourself on this topic.

An onion-eater proclaims his creed wherever he goes. He defies the world as it were. His very

breath literally challenges the opponents of his opinion. In a world which is being drilled by dictators to become an automaton, it is something to have the onion, to have one's own opinion upon. Even the junior-most Nazi storm-trooper, I guess, will display the courage of his convictions and stand up as a pro-or anti-(as the case might be) onionist, to the very face of the Fuehrer if need be !

This appears to me to be the main merit of an onion—to make a free man of you, at any rate where the merits of the onion are concerned. I have even heard it said that the onion is as well helpful in making a he-man of you—in the physiological sense, I mean. Some old world pharmacopoeias indeed recommended a preparation of onions as the primitive version of the modern rejuvenation therapy. It was also advised as an excellent cure for colds, as an unfailing specific against insomnia, as a guaranteed blood-purifier, as an effective poultice for wounds and boils, and as a cleansing and toning agent for the entire bodily system.

An onion a meal, rather than an apple a day, thus keeps the doctor away. And all this, mark you, over and above discharging its main function as a provender. Verily it is a most virtuous vegetable—this little onion dug from the bosom of Mother Earth. Nature has lavished her bounty through the onion. Fit for a prince's plate, it is available to the poorest of the poor. Praise be to the Lord that He created this most exquisite edible !

The onion no doubt has one drawback, if it can be called a drawback, and that is its smell. What rose without a thorn?—I may ask. Especially women are most finical and fastidious on this point. But on the subject of the aversion of the fair sex to onions, let me allow the inimitable Y. Y. to have his say :

“Nine women out of ten detest the onion. They say that it smells abominably—one of the grossest fictions that have ever imposed themselves on mortals. An onion-loving man finds himself avoided at dances. I myself gave up dancing at an early age, largely because I had to choose between dancing and onions.

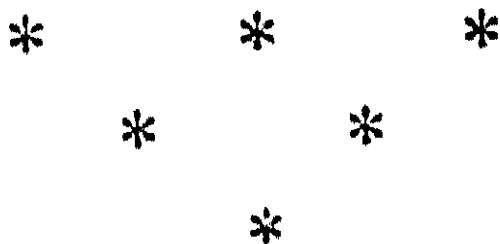
“I have heard it said that the smell of onions can be taken away if, after eating them, you eat a little parsley, and I have been told that there are onion-eaters of the compromising sort who, fearing what women may think of them, are for ever eating parsley. This I regard as evidence of a lack of spirit.” (I fully agree!—N.G.J.) “The onion-lover ought to stand up for his principles and to do all in his power to make the onion popular, and to compel its recognition as a vegetable fitted for the most refined company. If women can be compelled to accept and ultimately to enjoy tobacco, there is no reason, why they should not be compelled to accept and ultimately to enjoy onions. Let the good work begin at once.”

I assure the good Y. Y. that it has ! The Onion

Anti-Defamation Society, which was founded by some enthusiastic onion-eaters of Kalamazoo (Michigan, U.S.A.), is successfully functioning for many months now. After much painstaking research the O.A.-D.S. experts have evolved the following formula for overcoming the supposed smell of the onion :

Make everyone eat onions and then none can complain of the breath of anybody else !

Q.E.D.



XIV. IN THE SPRING...

IN THE spring, a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

Rightly has Tennyson observed thus and now that spring is once more with us, I make no doubt that many of our young friends will bid farewell to the loneliness of single state and set out to explore the bitter sweets of matrimony. From the vantage point of a confirmed old bachelorhood, I wish them all well, bid them *bon voyage* and god-speed.

Let their bark of romance reach the haven of a happy home and let the true pole-star of their love shine constantly to guide them safe. Spring was apparently meant to be the starting season of nuptial navigation ; and the ancient Hindus were shrewd folks in their day, when they hit upon spring-time as the chief mating months of the calendar. The next couple of months, the wedding bells will peal their loudest.

There are not a few, however, who feel that spring is so much of a good thing wasted, a sheer superfluity in our country. It is, they consider, not a month of romance but of regrets, a season not of



No use asking your Maud to come into the garden !

joy but of sorrow. As I think of it, I myself used to bemoan in my salad days the lot of young men in this land—where the maidens are so shy and where the parents are so infernally meddlesome and overbearing. Spring may warm one's blood, and the April moon may make one wistful—In vain, in vain !

Romance is a rare bird here : no opportunities of paying court to your queen-to-be ; no chance of half-

shy, half-sly, little confidences; no possibility of half-whispered, half-understood secrets! No use asking your Maud to come into the garden where "the musk of the roses is blown," for lynx-eyed Mamma is keeping a pretty good watch on her! And you have to beware of your own pater too, who will give you a hell of a time if he ever catches you in such gallivantings!

Wedlock in this benighted land merely means so brief a wedding—and subsequent long locking! Marriages, it is said, are made in heaven. But here in India they have a well-established market, a regular Marriage Exchange where brides and grooms are quoted according to time-honoured principles. They have seasonal fluctuations no doubt and the market tone in spring months is generally very strong and bullish,—but that is all what spring means to our matrimonial Mussolinis!

In vain do young hearts flutter in the summer breeze. They know that it is a hopeless longing and that while they are suffering from the fever and the fret, Papa is shrewdly driving a hard bargain somewhere and sealing their future at the best price available. Our boys and girls should, therefore, be excused if they cast a yearning look at the West and envy their brothers and sisters across the seas, who may be tripping "on the light fantastic toe" just at this very moment or skipping hand in hand on the village common, while they are sitting sulking and brooding here.

It cannot be denied that Cupid has a freer and merrier innings in the West than in the East. His victims have rarely "an endless rue for their reward" as is the case so often here. And if a love-lorn swain curses the stars which gave him birth in tropical climes, many of us will naturally sympathise with him.

As I observed above, I myself shared these opinions in younger days ; and I cannot but ascribe much of my present freedom to that. But as I grow older, I wonder whether such views do not represent only one side of the shield and whether much cannot be said on behalf of our good old marriage contracts and customs as well. They at any rate endured, those olden unions. And if youthful fancy did not always fall in with the parental choice, well, love had plenty of time to find its root. It was not all a Sahara of frustration.

Looking at the other picture, the Western system of matrimony will also be found to have its own drawbacks and shortcomings. I am not thinking of Judge Ben Lindsay, for the good old Judge has already become a back number. His "Revolt of Youth" has spent itself and the "Companionate Marriage," too, is being cast on the scrap-heap. To-day the cry is for eugenics and the new science bids fair to hold all the o'd-world romance under its iron heel.

Those who are so inclined, or those who pride themselves on being the very shape of things to come, may welcome the present apotheosis of eugenics. For myself I cannot but feel considerable misgiving and

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trepidation over the tendencies that are manifesting themselves in the West at present. A little amount of eugencis may do a lot of good in obvious cases. But when science starts a very regimentation of romance, when in the name of eugenics young men and women begin to be dealt with as live-stock, one must cry halt !

But that is exactly what is happening to-day in some countries. Would-be brides and grooms have first to submit themselves to what virtually amounts to a "third degree" before a matrimonial licence is issued to them. A number of extremely intimate questions relating to physical, material and spiritual standing have to be satisfactorily answered before the Dictator of the Marriage Bureau will issue a visa to the land of wedded bliss.

As I write, there is before me the summary of a marriage application form which has now to be filled in before German men and women will be allowed to marry. For the Nazis, as was only to be expected, have been the first to avail themselves of the new-fangled Eugenic Inquisition. They have found in it an excellent handmaid for their doctrine of unmixed Nordic blood. For the preservation of the pure Aryanism of the coming generations, the German youths of to-day have to submit to a pre-marital autopsy of their whole *persona*. The form, which a doctor has to countersign, must bear at the top left-hand corner two photographs of the bride or bridegroom, one taken full-face, the other profile. It must

also bear the signatures of the parents. So far, so good. But then starts a whole series of "marriage health laws," which will unnerve the most dauntless aspirant to hymeneal honours.

"You are expected to begin at the very beginning and to confess to all your childish complexes. Then they want to know when you learnt to walk and to speak—which is hardly an item of which one has personal recollection. Then perhaps you can enlighten them about your emotional reflexes. Your smoking, drinking and other minor sins have, of course, to be accounted for. Then follows a formidable array of questions regarding your general bodily condition, muscular development, bone construction, disposition of fat, nervous reactions, and various measurements.

A whole page is provided for details of numerous minor physical facts and of your *psyche* and fertility. And as if this was not sufficient to take away the first bloom from love's young dream, there follows a sheer beauty asking you to expatiate upon your spiritual development, school and professional training and possible criminal tendencies. And after you have run the whole gamut of this cross-examination, the doctor may recommend you to marry, not to marry, or to marry a barren person ! "

Now I would like to know whether those of our young men and women who bemoan their lot would not choose to be palmed off by their own Papas and Mammias, howsoever hard-headed and mercenary they may appear, rather than become the mute victims of

those merciless and hard-hearted marriage dictators. Personally I would prefer to remain a life-long bachelor under such a eugenic regime.

Here is the answer suggested by a friend to that 'possible criminal tendencies' query : "Well, as a matter of fact, I have not hitherto given much thought to my criminal tendencies ; but now you mention it, perhaps I do detect a certain aptitude for homicide—I should like to murder the man who drew up this list of questions !"

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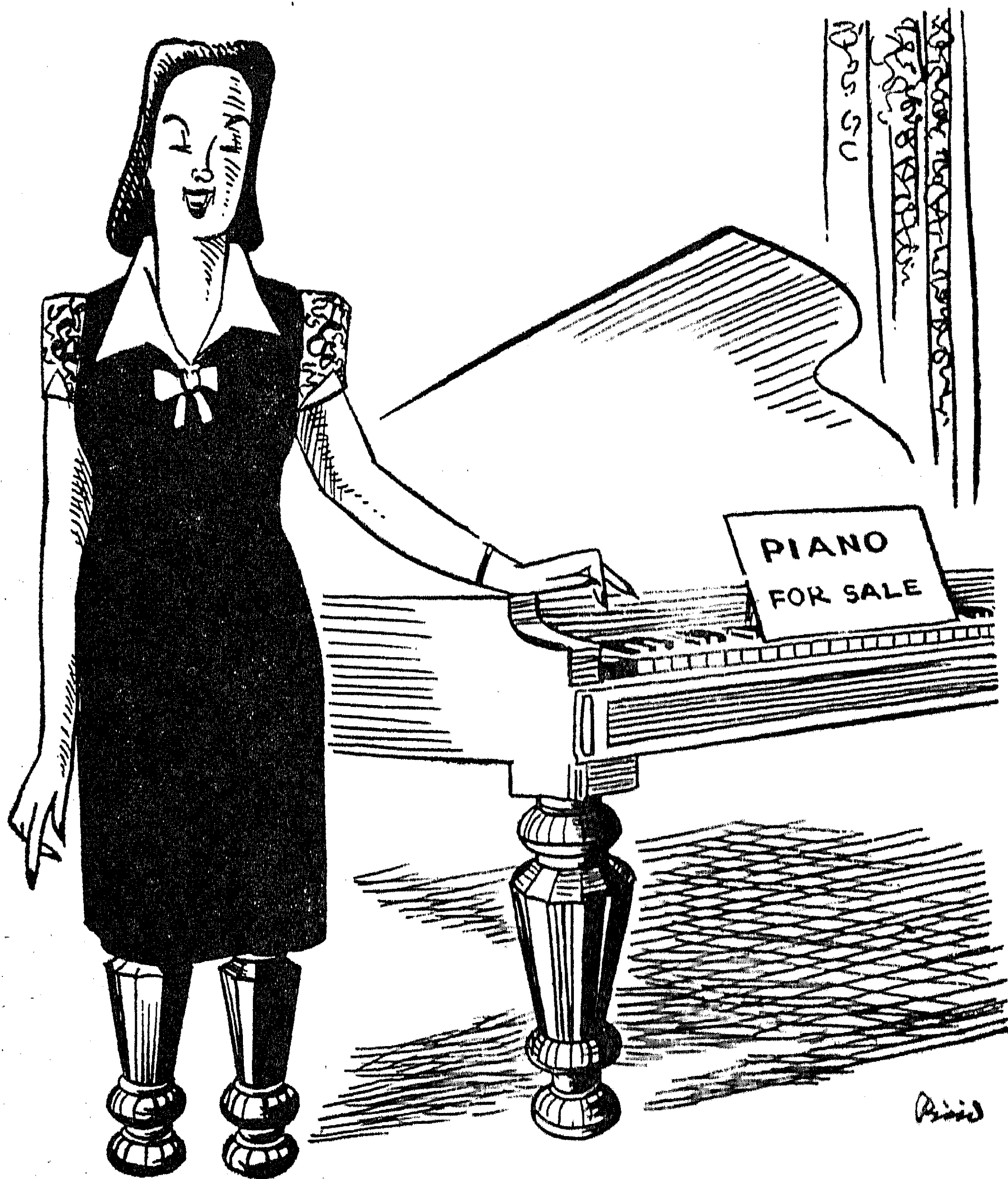
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XV. THE MIGHTY MITE

P*IANO for sale the property of a lady with carved legs.*

Every schoolboy is familiar with this classical advertisement. It was excusable if one failed to grasp in young days the humour underlying this howler, addled as one's brains were under the shadow of the old teacher's birch. Nor has anybody ever come across this freak lady in adult life though one may have appreciatively glanced over a variety of female legs. The carved legs of the famous lady (she has already become an *Antique* by now) will, however, be treasured long to perplex, if not to instruct, innumerable future generations of boys and girls.

One no doubt profoundly pities the lady with the carved legs. But then she is a woman with a mission. For does she not serve as the grammarian's grim warning against the pitfalls of punctuation? In fact the carved legs do not belong to her at all. They are the appurtenance of the piano, which is the property of the lady. What were the real legs of the



...the property of a lady with carved legs.

lady like, has been discreetly hidden from the gaze of history.

The alleged anatomical freak is only the red signal to all those who hazard to put pen to paper. The fate which overtook the poor lady may be ours at any moment unless we take scrupulous care to insert the

little marks of punctuation in the proper places. We must guard against both the extremes—a profusion of them would be as confusing as their paucity.

Let me hasten to add that this is not meant to be a lesson in punctuation. I am not one of those clever blokes who guarantee to polish your grammar, or to teach you perfect English, or to make you a Master of Words in the course of a few lessons, which you can do while waiting for the tea or the train (the first lesson being forwarded per V.P.P.!) On the contrary I often wonder if there is any grammar left in me at all to prevent me from sinking into the inky depths to which an unkindly fate has led me.

What I mean to say is that this punctuation is a confounded nuisance. English (or for the matter of that any language) as she is spoke is infinitely simpler than written English, precisely because we can ignore in our conversation points and half-points, colons and semi-colons, which we have to employ as guides in our composition. One can easily make one's meaning clear by the modulation of voice, but the manipulation of those mighty mites, the punctuation marks, is an ordeal for most of us. Even Homer is known to nod occasionally and Dr. Fowler, too, can be detected to have made a wrong stop in his King's English—that Paradise of Purists and Purgatory of Journalists.

Take, for example, the 'comma' which is the humblest member of the tribe. The wretched thing cannot be even said to have an independent existence of its own ; it only serves as a halfway house to the

full stop. But what latent capacity for mischief it has got! Miss it altogether and it will land you in the museum of horrors, as it did the poor lady with a piano on her hands. Insert it in the wrong place and it will give you no end of excruciating agony like a gnat in your eye or a gravel in your shoe. In fact it is even capable of causing an explosion like a loosened nut in a dynamo.

Here before me as I write is the epic of a comma which cost the United States over a million dollars in revenue. The mistake occurred in the printing of a tariff bill free list which as issued read, "fruit, trees etc." instead of "fruit trees etc.", thus opening a huge door for the tax-free entry of everything from a nut to an oak. It is only fair to mention here that on another occasion the accidental omission of a comma made Uncle Sam the gainer to the tune of £100,000 from John Bull.

A similar oversight in the text of the recent Wheat Bill would have cost the French Farmers £3,000,000, had it not been detected in time, thanks to the vigilance of a Senator.

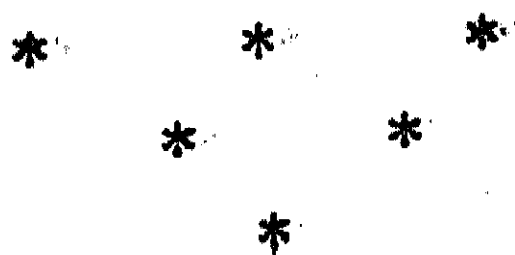
A wrongly inserted comma can cause serious mischief even in other than financial fields. There is the classic example of a report sent by Sir John French during an offensive in the last Great War. The relevant sentence read: "We captured the western outskirts of Hulluch, the village of Loos and the minining works round it, and Hill 70." But unfortunately the last comma was an interloper (as Hill 70

had not been taken) and it involved the High Command in a grave misunderstanding of the actual position of operations.

Commas, however, are well beloved of the bibliophiles. They will seize upon every variation in the text with avidity, and even an uncalled-for comma is known to have heightened the interest and price of a publication. Mr. Laurence Houseman has told an amusing anecdote about his brother, the famous author of *The Shropshire Lad*. When a friend wrote that she had been unable to obtain a copy of the first edition of *Last Poems* and had to be content with the second, A. E. H. replied: "In that case you have the more valuable edition. In the first, two commas are missing!"

The moral of the piece is: Scorn not the comma. Don't take liberties with it. Don't treat it lightly. Give it due attention and respect. It may be a mere mite, but a mighty one. Did not as great a literary artist as Oscar Wilde once take the credit for having done a hard day's work, because (as he tells us in an exquisite passage):

This morning I put in a comma,—and this afternoon I took it off. . .



XVI. WAR AND THE PROPHETS

IT SEEMED a safe prediction two years ago that the war would give a knock-out blow to our astrologers and palmists, star-readers and crystal-gazers, numerologists and graphologists, card-shufflers and tea-leaves-scanners, and all others who by various ways and means pose as prophets and seers.

All of them were unanimous and emphatic that there would be no war in 1939. Month after month and week after week they solemnly assured us through their columns in the popular press that Hitler would not fight. *Definitely not this year, perhaps the next!*—they sometimes put in a post-script just by way of caution.

It was the Chamberlain Plan of Appeasement rather than the Chart of the Planets which emboldened them to persist in their cocksure predictions. Munich to them was the Milky Way of European Peace and the British Premier its vigilant watchman.

So when on that historic third of September, 1939, the news was broadcast that Britain was at war with Germany, it came as a bolt from the blue to them. Till the eleventh hour, literally till eleven A.M. of that

Sunday when the British ultimatum expired, they were hoping against hope that a Runciman would arise and give a "Realistic" re-orientation to the Polish corridor question and thus avert the Armageddon in the nick of time.

But it was not to be ! The British Government, declared the late Mr. Chamberlain in sorrowful tones, was at war with Germany. If there was consternation among the ranks of appeasers, pandemonium reigned supreme in the kingdom of the prophets !

The planets had let them down badly. They were hurled from their astral eminence. Their reputation for omniscience had received a shattering blow... Yes ! It seemed a safe prediction two years ago that the profession of fortune-tellers, like that of witch-doctors, would be remembered only as a historical curiosity.

But like all other predictions this, too, came a cropper ! The press is still full of prophecy columns. We are yet being regularly informed "What Do The Stars Foretell" and advised "How To Plan With The Planets !"

Were they non-plussed ?—those brave prophets who all through the hectic days before the beginning of hostilities were assuring us again and again that there would be no war ? They had planned their contracts all right ; and they had to keep their columns running even though they had to explain away one week what they foretold in the preceding.

Here is Edward Lyndoe, the heavenly corres-

pondent of *The People*, philosophising over his dismal failure :

“The stars predicted peace ; indications in that direction have been strong for months. But the stars are not the dictators of mankind they can only offer guidance. In the end man must work out his own destiny. And to-day unhappily, the folly of a madman threatens the very roots of civilization.”

This is clever but not much of a defence. R. H. Naylor, who needs no introduction to those interested in astrology, was more forthright in his confession :

“Perhaps natural optimism, perhaps the fact that the wish is father to the thought, led me to hope that peace might be saved. I was wrong.”

And old Moore tragically admitted “Hitler cheated even *me!*” though personally I think it was Neville Chamberlain who played that trick.

The era of sackcloth and ashes proved shortlived. The prophets quickly triumphed over what was thought to be their Waterloo and began to dole out their periodical dope with redoubled vigour. After all war is the time of uncertainty and anxiety. Even though the people are sorely disillusioned, they have not lost their interest in the future—nay, it has an added edge in view of the life and death struggle that is going on all over the world.

Curiosity may have killed the cat but it keeps the tribe of prophets alive. Far from receiving a

K. O., the prophecy business has begun a boom as a result of the war. In the middle of this year "Mass Observation" conducted a detailed study of the extent and nature of astrological belief among ordinary people in Britain. Nearly two-thirds of the adult population, it was found, glance at or read some astrological feature more or less regularly. About four out of ten have some degree of belief or interest in astrology, this figure being made up mainly of women.

No popular paper in Britain is now complete without the feature dealing with the future. The anxiety to get a glimpse into coming events pervades all classes of the public. Mr. Tom Harrison noted regrettably the other day that "In several newspapers the prediction feature is now roughly as influential as the editorial columns!" The prophecies of Lyndoe, Naylor and Co. are listened to as respectfully as the speeches of Winston Churchill and his Cabinet colleagues!

This is indeed an amazing state of affairs. The "Blitz" developments of the war have again and again belied the easy-going prognostications of the prophets and the soothsayers. How dangerous a guide prediction is, was revealed by the test *Picture Post* carried out the other day. It selected nine outstanding events of the last two years and checked how many of these were forecast correctly or indirectly by the popular prophets. Out of the maximum score of 45, the highest scored was 13, which is not even a passing percentage. And yet people go on lapping those,

predictions week by week and following them unconsciously.

If this is the situation in educated and advanced Britain, we need not be much surprised to find that in our country, too, astrologers are going strong. Most of the weekly journals in the vernacular carry the prediction column nowadays, though it is extremely creditable to our English-language press that it has so far escaped the contagion. It is also noticeable that our prophets confine themselves generally to domestic and business interests of their fans, their excursions in the international field being only seasonal. Perhaps the Defence of India Rules are making them feel that silence is the better part of prophecy.

What is the explanation of this hold of the prophets on the public mind? The natural desire to fathom the future is of course there, but then it has been proved time and again that the glimpse that the prophets provide is nothing but a mirage. Why should the public then go on scanning the prediction column as eagerly as ever?

Perhaps because it is a source of cheap entertainment. You need not necessarily believe what your pet prophet writes but it is always interesting to see what the stars foretell you according to his calculations. There is at any rate the pleasure of catching him wrong!

Again it is a means of escapism. Escapism from the drab and dreary present into the rosy future,—the future being always rosy. Hope springs eternal in the human breast and one always feels that there is

something round the corner, something that will lift you from your rut and plant your feet firmly on the road to success and prosperity.

A little study of the prophets reveals that the stars are always foretelling what you want to be foretold. Our press prophets are never gloomy pessimists but cheery souls brimming with glad tidings. "Watch out next Sunday," they write, "for the dark and handsome young man who is going to cross your path." This is sufficient to send the heart of every spinster in the country pit-a-pat. What if that young man never materialises? There is always another Sunday and another dark and handsome young man to look forward to; the stars cannot go wrong...

The prophets are clever psychologists and they know what the public wants. Ever since the war started, for example, humanity as a whole has desired nothing more intensely than the return of peace. Periodically, therefore, the prophets predict victory and peace. "The present planetary influences indicate the collapse of the enemy in the future," impartially prognosticate the astrologers in both the camps!

On the very next day of the declaration of war we received in our office from a South Indian astrologer a confident forecast based on Chamberlain's horoscope that the hostilities would end in a fortnight! For once my annoyance got the better of my patience and I unceremoniously threw the manuscript into the w.p.b. I really repent this now, for he was surely a brave man even though he had got his stars all wrong.



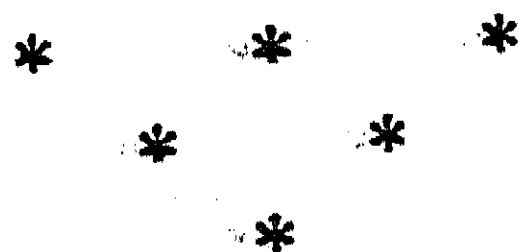
Hitler himself is a confirmed believer in the occult sciences.

Personally I believe neither in ghosts nor in prophets. But since my childhood I have entertained a very lively fear of the former and an irresistible interest in the latter. And after meeting a number of minor prophets I must say that not all of them are a pack of cheats, many of them being as honest and conscientious in their beliefs and actions as you and I. The fault perhaps lies in the conjunction of planets at the moment of their birth !

There is a weighty reason, nevertheless, why we should treat the fraternity of prophets respectfully as far as the present war is concerned. For whatever our own views may be about astrology and allied sciences, it is a well-known fact that Hitler himself is a confirmed believer in the occult sciences.

He is reputed to have his own staff of astrologers, palmists etc., whose advice is always sought by the Fuehrer. Indeed, it is said that he gave the word for the attack on Poland on the last day of August, 1939, because it was considered by his Astral Bureau to be the peak day of his career. *Now or Never*, said the prophets and that is how the dogs of war were unleashed that fateful morning in world's history.

So let us follow the prophets if only because the Fuehrer is following them. No medicine can be better for the war-mad world than the hair of the dog that bit it !



XVII. THE BULLS*

THE newspapers seem to be entirely lacking in any sensation at present. We are moreover passing through the fag-end of the season, which combines the discomforts both of summer and monsoon without the redeeming features of either. These dog-days would have been insufferably dull indeed, had it not been for the BULLS!

You know the Bulls, of course ; don't you ? Like a Colossus they bestride the narrow world to-day, while you and I, gentle reader (to continue Cassius' homily to Brutus,)—we petty men walk under their huge legs!—Or almost. They monopolise the public lime-light ; they are stabled in palaces, and go about in specially fitted motor vans !

One opens the newspaper in the morning only to find a dissertation on the Bull. If one tunes up the radio at lunch-time, one hears the bellowing of the Bull. If one goes to a picture in the evening, there is again that Bull majestically stalking on the silver

* Soon after his assumption of the Viceroyalty of India in 1936, Lord Linlithgow launched a movement for the improvement of cattle. The presentation of stud bulls to the country-side, which was one of the main planks of his programme, quickly became the fashion in official circles.

screen ! The Bull at last has come into his own ; he has scored the bull's-eye all right. One almost feels in a nightmare that providence had made a Bull of oneself . . .

The Bull, however, (to be less hysterical and more historical) has always been a somebody in India. It is only lately that he fell upon evil days like many of his human fellows. In ancient times the Bull was held to be a sacred animal. He was the favourite mount of God *Shiva*, the Destroyer, and his constant companion and most loyal pal. Many are the tales told of master and mount. And even now they are inseparables as you can find for yourself in every temple dedicated to Shiva from Haradwar to Rameshwaram.

While the God is inside, the Bull's image must always be outside, and no true Hindu will enter the sanctuary without first saluting *Nandi*, the divine Bull ! As a matter of fact both Mr. and Mrs. Bull have an honoured place in the Hindu Pantheon, and countless generations of Indians have been worshipping them. Even to-day a consecrated Bull bears a charmed life ; he goes where he will and how he will ; and every Indian bazar has its own "God's Bull" roaming at large.

In European history also the Bull has been very conspicuous. But to be precise, it was the metaphorical variety and not the butting, hoofing one with which we are familiar. The exploits of the Papal "Bulls" are too well-known to be recounted here.

The burning of the "Bull" by Martin Luther is an event of epochal importance in the annals of Christendom. The various "Bulls" drawn against English sovereigns like Henry VIII and Elizabeth have immensely influenced subsequent English history. The Britisher's favourite nickname is John Bull and it is really most appropriate considering that he is the champion beef-eater of the world. The Indian and the Englishman thus both adore the Bull, even if it be from slightly different angles !

One must not, therefore, grudge the Bull his new-found glory. If he has taken up his quarters in the Viceroy's House, he only deserves them. If to-day he takes precedence over everything and everybody else, he has a rich claim to that honour. So long he was a God's mount ; now he has become a Viceroy's motto—which is surely a promotion. From the pantheon to politics is not after all a far cry. So far, along with his master, he typified ruin and destruction ; now he is hailed as the "open sesame" of success and prosperity.

A Bull is henceforth to be the main plank of the new millenium. The chain of reasoning is, it ought to be confessed, a bit too long and a bit too complicated. But if you have imagination and patience enough, it will be found to be as demonstrable as an axiom of Euclid. May I try it for you ? Good Bull—better breed—bigger cows—more milk—healthier babies—stronger men and women—increased economic pro-

XVIII. PECCAVI!

THOUGH no one has so far been able to find its exact location, all of us are supposed to have a sort of conscience.

It is the altar of rectitude, the seat of justice, the mouthpiece of the Almighty. It serves as the highest tribunal of appeal in our anatomy in spite of its invisible nature. Constantly we hear voices raised to it in supplication, and though the Oracle is often mute or Nelson-like it sometimes turns the blind eye, all of us still stick to our faith in that semi-divine institution.

Conscience has always been a thing very dear to purists, moralists, Pecksniffs and Mrs. Grundies. From the earliest times they have succeeded in making of conscience the biggest human complex, a sort of super-fetish lodged within us since our birth. Freud and his followers did their best to debunk it by dismissing it as the accumulated excrescence of ages. Conscience, however, yet reigns supreme even though it may not always govern.

Conscience is supposed to be the "still, small voice within," which like an alarm clock, while



...or on those nights when you lie tossing in your bed.

ordinarily very silent, rings out its warning at the appropriate minute. And like the alarm clock it does its service mostly by mornings and nights—on the morning after the night before, when you are roused by the hammering in your head, or on those nights when you lie awake and tossing in your bed with that bad tooth-ache or with that bout of indigestion.

Then it is that all your past sins of omission and commission crowd in battalions in your brain and make a good text for Dame Conscience. Then that “still, small voice” swells into a veritable crescendo of

condemnation, till you positively feel like King Richard :

*My conscience has a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale
And every tale condemns me for a villain.*

This abject feeling of utter self-reprobation is worse than the rack, especially when the arms of Morpheus refuse to soothe you for nights together. Not until have you made a befitting expiation before that flaming vision, not until have you delivered yourself in sack-cloth and ashes unto its mercy, not until have you solemnly promised to undo all the big wrongs committed in your little life, will the vice-like grip of conscience leave you. And when you get up next morning, you feel like a criminal reprieved from the gallows, remorsefully crying : *Peccavi ! Peccavi ! ! I have sinned ! I have sinned . . .*

Then the mighty task of atonement begins. Diverse are the devil's ways and as diverse the paths that lead to expiation. Fortunately for most sinners—who amongst us is not ?—the various religions of the world have built a royal road to the Temple of Restitution. The priesthood is the toll-keeper and provided you pay the requisite dues—they are carefully graded according to the enormity of your sins and the length of your purse—you are assured of your safe passage. Then you are quits with your conscience ; “the still, small voice” lies hushed, and armed with your receipts, you can thenceforth sleep

in peace and even look forward serenely to the day of eternal sleep.

There are certain people, however, who are not satisfied with this kind of vicarious peace-making with their conscience. Theirs is the nagging, persistent variety, which does not rest satisfied until the victim has made a personal *amende honorable*. Hence we find so many persons making pious payments to those whom they might have defrauded ever so little.

Some years ago an Oxford don sent to the railway company £50, which he considered due from him as freight on books carried regularly without payment, though they were not allowed free as passengers' luggage. And recently the Commissioner of New York received a one dollar note from an anonymous person in respect of a tram fare—plus interest—which he bilked in 1901!

I do hope with all my heart that I for one shall never be stung by such twinges and pangs. For, to go in a reminiscent mood, the fares I have bilked from trams, buses, and even railways in my unregenerate days will certainly not be covered by a one dollar note. The restitution of all the petty larcenies, which are committed wittingly or unwittingly, may land many of us on the footpath!

By the way, a cynic cannot help noting the very curious fact that the reparations made as "conscience money" generally amount to trifling sums. It seems as if such payments are only gestures, a mere sop thrown to the call of piety, especially when some

religious movement is abroad or on occasions like the *Puja* or *Id* or Christmas. The fine moral fervour is satisfied with a little seasonal salve and a small donation here or an offering there puts one on the right side of one's conscience. It is more of a prick than a jab or a stab that conscience seems to be giving to those plaster saints.

There are really great possibilities of raising a good revenue by exploiting this conscience business. States which find big deficits in their budgets—which modern State does not?—can start a conscience crusade to help its exchequer. “Pay to your Government in order to placate your God,” really makes an excellent slogan. As a matter of fact the United States has already a fund appropriately called “Conscience Fund” in which such contributions are paid. This fund has been in existence for more than a century now and Uncle Sam has caught a good many fishes in this net. The biggest catch was when a sum of 80,000 dollars was received with the following touching confession :

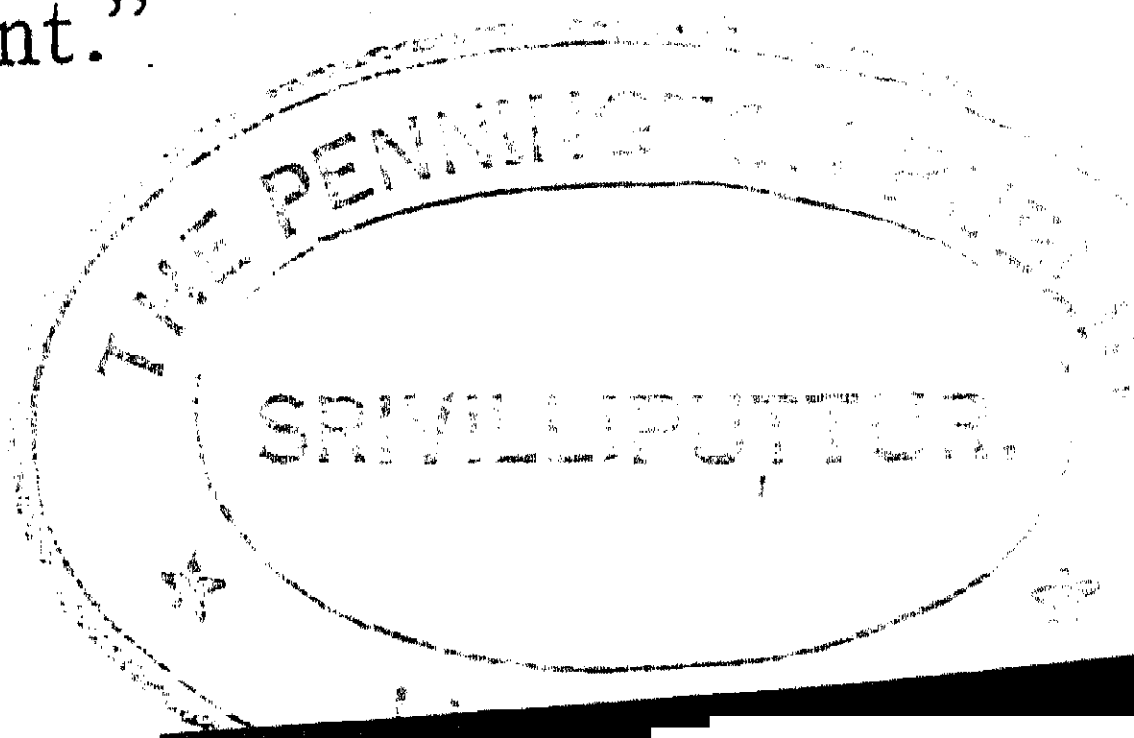
“I have hesitated about sending all this money, because I think it does not really belong to the government.” (Isn't this a nasty thing to say ? But to proceed—) “Conscience, however, has given me no rest until I have consummated the fourfold return of the money I originally stole. May every thief undersand the awfulness of the sin of stealing, is the sincere wish of a penitent.”

Amen !

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XIX. A KISS A DAY

ONE of the most picturesque countries in the East is Burma. The "Land of Pagodas" does not fail to cast its spell even over a casual visitor. In spite of half a century of the benign British rule, the Burmans have remained unspoilt and unsophisticated and still retain many of their native characteristics.

The Burman is a gay fellow, jolly and happy-go-lucky, though he is dangerous to a degree when his passions are roused. He leaves the major worries of life to be tackled by his better half and is content to be bossed by her as long as she leaves him in peace to enjoy his beloved cheroot.

The Burmese belle consequently enjoys an extraordinary amount of freedom, which might be envied even by many of her Western sisters. She manages her man as also her man's business very admirably indeed. There is a happy blend of romance and shrewdness in her character, which makes her personality all the more colourful.

If Burma as a whole is yet untouched by modern civilisation, the Shan States remain positively medieval. They are content to let progress pass by and gladly

stick to their old-world ideas and beliefs. It is not often that the inhabitants of these States intrude themselves upon the attention of the world. But their peaceful obscurity was illuminated a few weeks ago by a strange epidemic which swept over the Northern Shan States.

That nameless epidemic has baffled medical science and dumbfounded the rest of the world. No book of pathology mentions this disease and it seems to be purely a local affliction, unless the contagion communicates itself to the rest of the world—as it is very likely to do !

The symptoms of the malady are extraordinarily simple. They are fever, loss of appetite and a feeling of lassitude. But the specific which is being prescribed and followed by those delightful folks is far from simple. The only cure for this devastating disease, believe it or not !, is to kiss the patient ! The osculatory rites must be performed—need I say it ?—by a member of the opposite sex. A male patient will necessarily have to be treated by a female, and *vice versa*. There are further important provisos still.

Not for you, if you were a Shan, the ministrations of your seventy-year old grandmother nor of that elephant-toothed aunt, no, not even of your own wife, when you feel those symptoms stealing over you (as I am almost doing at this moment !) For it is expressly provided, bless the Shan medicine-men !, that no relative can poke his or her nose—or lips, to be more precise—in this business. Only non-relatives can

volunteer their services, and there seems to be no dearth of volunteers either !

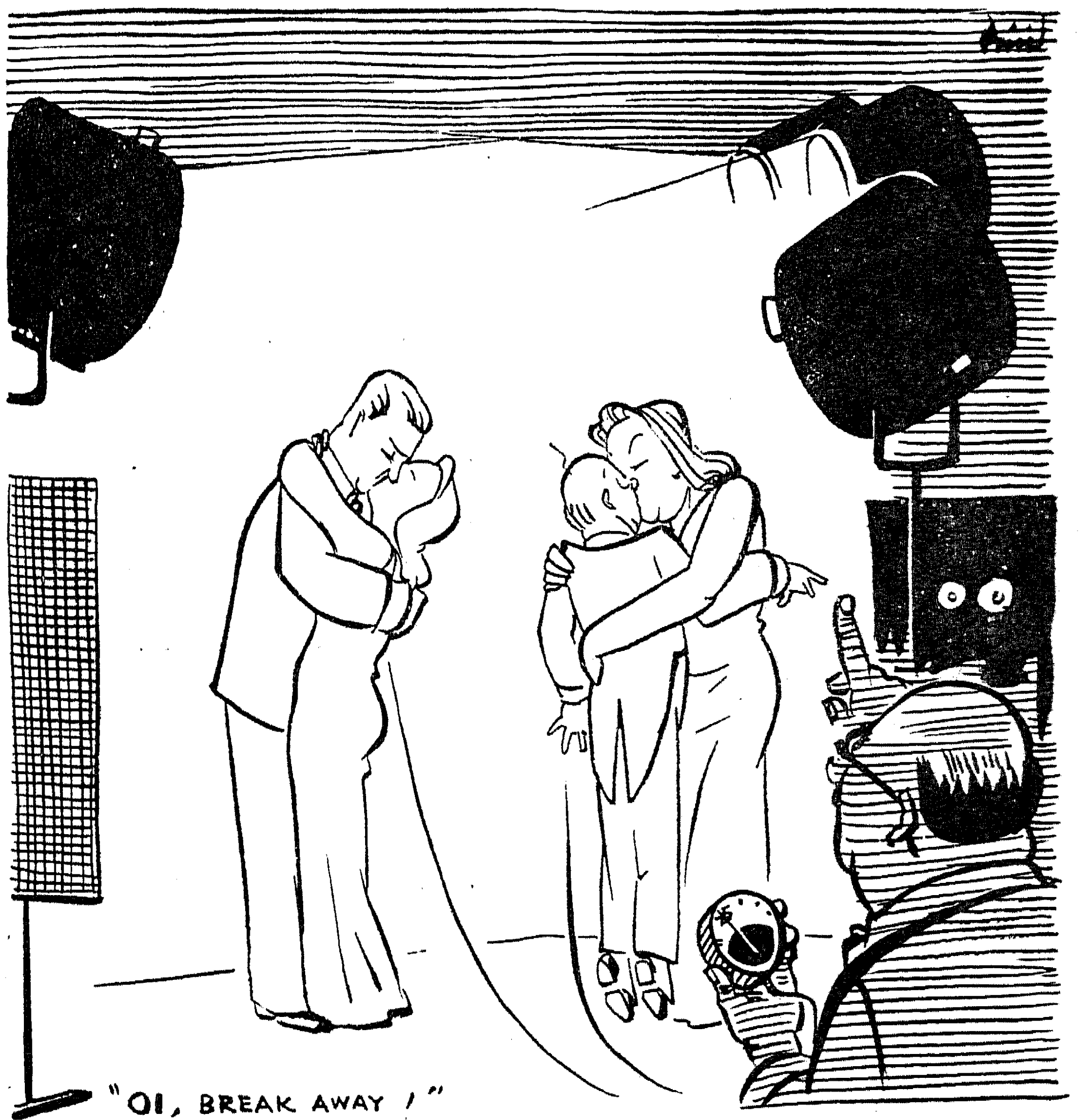
The incidence of this disease is naturally to be found mainly in the late teens and early twenties, though even confirmed bachelors and old maids of any age are occasionally susceptible to the infection. Married men will have obviously to take scrupulous prophylactic care to avoid falling a prey to the ravages of this malady, if they are to preserve their domestic harmony !

Now, what do you think of it ? Don't dismiss this as a fib of some moon-struck journalist's imagination. I for one fully believe this report. This is how the primitive scores over the ultra-modern. I daresay the good Shans are not evincing one-hundredth of the excitement over their actual visitation which the rest of the world is doing over its mere report. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, or if you prefer plain English, Evil to him who evil thinks.

A kiss is after all common and proper, as the schoolgirl replied when asked what kind of noun it was. It affords a very simple and a very homely remedy for a rather unorthodox illness. What is there to be so much flustered about ? If a kiss a day keeps—well, if not the doctor, at any rate the disease away,—why, nothing can be jollier than that ! No doubt there is a snag in this prescription—the application of the osculatory dose must not come from your own spouse ! But that is the concern only of Mr. and

Mrs. Shan and you and I need not lose our peace here on that account.

The prescription of "A Kiss A Day" may be followed with great advantage even in non-Shan countries. You may be knowing that of course, but I am talking in a strictly scientific sense. After years of painstaking research and numerous experiments, Prof. Robert Stephenoff, who is a noted authority on the subject, has arrived at the definite conclusion that

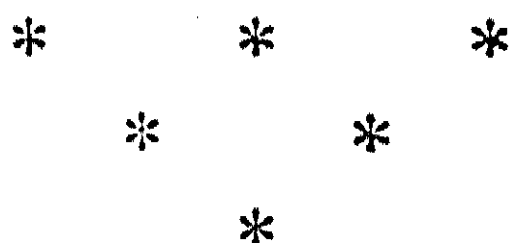


25 lbs. is considered to be the standard pressure.

kissing has a most vitalising and stimulating effect on one's constitution. Kissing brings the blood tingling to one's cheeks and makes the complexion purer and rosier. (This refers to the fair partner particularly.) Not only this but the increased circulation has also a most beneficial effect upon the tear ducts, which makes the eyes look like limpid pools.

There are kisses and kisses and the above applies only to the ideal variety. It is futile, for instance, to expect the less than half-hearted peck of a husband who is hurrying after the 9-30 fast to register any subtle sea-change on the clammy face of a nagging wife! Our medicinal "kiss a day" must be taken with the proper partner and the proper pep and the proper pressure.

Leaving the first two to be decided by yourself, I may note here in passing that twenty-five pounds is considered to be the standard pressure by a noted Hollywood star who must be knowing her ropes pretty thoroughly. Beware, however, of the exceptional kisses which seem to stifle one's very soul...but I must not go beyond my depths.



XX. ON DRAWING A BLANK

SO ANOTHER ten rupees gone for good ! One more Derby sweep has come and gone leaving most of us high and dry as usual.

The succession of blanks, however, leaves the true-blue gambler cold. He is inured to those reverses, he anticipates them and subconsciously he almost welcomes them. He is the true exponent of the philosophy of action. The result matters but little. The joy lies in the doing of it.

Buying a seasonal sweep ticket is a ritual, an offering at the altar of blind destiny. One expects as much to come out of it as out of any other offering at the feet of any other deity. Still the votaries have always believed in a god by a sort of instinct, and the true gambler also believes in the capacity of the roulette disc or the revolving drum to dole out a new earth and a new heaven to him. The chances might be one to a million, but that one chance is there to sustain human hope and to provide one with delicious, divine day-dreams.

What castles do we build in the air ?—castles that have never been seen in history or heard in story !

Each has its own distinctive purpose, pattern and personality. And after having revelled in those flights of fancy, after having had our heart's fill of hoping—which is worth not ten, but a thousand, nay, a million rupees—we wake up one fine morning to realise like Charles Lamb that they have all been Dream Children and go our accustomed ways with our aplomb unruffled. Only those coloured strips of paper remain with us like crumpled flowers that have lost their fragrance, or like old love letters which have outlived their meaning. Only those coloured pieces bought with fluttering hands as the “open sesame” of fortune now remain with us as mute tokens of mighty “Might-have-beens !”

Have those sweeps done anybody any good, except may be to their conductors ?—one may pursue the problem from another angle and ask. The profound philosophy which made the poet Wordsworth leave “Yarrow Unvisited” will be found to hold good here also. Where are all those foundlings of fortune whose names we have read from time to time as having drawn first prize in this or that sweep ? Where are their castles—the castles we hoped to build ourselves ? History does not record their names, nor do the Muses sing their fame.

Where is Suresh whom I once bitterly envied for having won the first prize in our school raffle, to wit a decrepit bicycle ? (It did not seem decrepit then !) Where is Emilio Scala—if I am not mistaken, that was the name of the Italian waiter who stunned the gold-

diggers of the five continents by drawing the fabulous first prize of the first Irish Hospitals' Sweepstakes? What has become of his castle?—he for one did forthwith purchase an actual ducal castle! And is not Cuffin, who rode to his dream-land on the back of "Fobra," the wonder horse, more happy under the sod than he was above it in his hectic career of triumph?

What of the many other men and women who have been momentarily transported to their seventh heaven? Has the realisation of their hopes brought them any lasting happiness? Or has it been like the sowing of the Upas tree, the source of endless ills? How many of them are to-day repenting like Wordsworth (who in his latter years was prevailed upon to visit it): *And is this Yarrow?*

These are not sour grape musings. For the philosophy of gambling has a duality about it. I am not talking about your street-corner gambler—the garden variety. I refer to the gambler as an artist, a philosopher, a hero if you will. The true gambler sees life straight and sees it whole. He hopes and yet hopes not—and it is difficult to know which is the more predominant feeling. He is above everything else A MAN, *a la* Kipling, for he is ever ready to

*Make one heap of all your winnings,
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breath a word about your loss.*

He is neither depressed by defeat nor elated by victory. He delights in snapping his fingers at destiny



One of the most democratic fraternities of the world.

itself. I have always hoped for some genius to explain the philosophy of gambling as Omar Khayyam has done that of the grape. There will be found to be a surprising similarity between these two, for both after all can be traced to the same defiance man has always harboured against the dark ways of an inscrutable providence.

Gamblers form one of the most democratic fraternities in the world. There are no artificial

distinctions in their ranks, no snobbery, no colour bar, no established privileges. All are free and equal and the wheel of fortune is, next to death, the greatest leveller. The line that divides the top and the bottom is the thinnest and those that temporarily find themselves on the crest of the wave therefore entertain the deepest sympathy for their less lucky fellows.

I have always wondered why our modern State and Society, which are themselves rooted in the most rampant inequality and have always flourished on a process of exploitation of the weaker, should look askance at a harmless sweep. A sweep may not be the best way of redistribution of wealth, but at any rate there is no humbug about it. It can claim far more fairness than the recognized capitalist methods of making money. It is very significant indeed that even the Soviet Government has not banned sweeps, though it has given short shrift to other things of the ancient regime.

When I buy a sweep ticket, I know exactly what I am doing, and that can hardly be said when, say, I buy a scrip in the stock exchange. Nor have I ever regretted losing my money, for I know that it has enlivened the life of some other needy soul. It is a very voluntary subscription for diffusing light and happiness among our fraternity, whose ranks are open to all on perfectly equal terms. If there were more of this spirit abroad, the earth would be a far happier place to live in !



XXI. IN DEFENCE OF FANS

IN THE great industry of screen glamour the fan is at once the hero and the villain. For his delectation are stars born. To please him do scouts scour the four quarters of the globe and discover the raw material, which has to be shorn and plucked, groomed and polished, before it can be presented as a finished product on the silver screen, labelled as "IT" or "OOMPH."

Now the poor fan, who has ultimately to pay for all the protracted and costly processes by which the utterly commonplace goose is metamorphosed into the "Swan Celestial," is himself put in the dock. He is accused of want of manners or rather of having very offensive manners. He annoys the stars by his unwanted attentions ; he pesters them with libidinous fan-mail ; and sometimes he even persecutes them in person with his amorous advances.

Fans, where are your manners ? Fans, why do you hang open-mouthed around studio doors ? Fans,

why do you carry bouquets to the premieres of your idols' pictures ? Fans, why are you fans ?

But what else can the poor fan do ? He has to be true to himself or lose his identity. In the latter case it means making the world fan-less. And what would be a star without a fan ? Not even a star.

It is unnecessary to discuss here whether the cinema is meant only for popular enjoyment or whether we should have pictures with a purpose. Suffice it to say that the phenomenal progress of the film industry was solely due to its ability to serve as a means of escapism for men and women, children and adults, the poor as well as the rich.

When the lights go out and one's favourite hero or heroine or villain appears on the screen, one can surrender oneself entirely to the swift-moving tempo of the story. One can in fact leave one's mortal frame (as the *Yogis* are supposed to do) and for a brief, hectic hour live in the being of another. We can laugh and weep, flirt and love, win and lose, and do everything that in our humdrum life we have always day-dreamed of doing. We can leap right through the Keatsian "charmed magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn."

The sudden switching on of the lights and the strains of "God Save The King" bring us to our feet—and to our senses. But not quite. We are no doubt rudely awakened out of the etherealised existence but our souls still cling to the vestige of unreality. The tranced sojourn beyond space and time might have

been unreal ; but the stars in the screen firmament are very much real. They are alive, vital, human. Surely we can catch them by the hand. At any rate lay our hearts at their feet.

At that very moment a fan is born. He is an amorphous creature and therefore amoral. He is a being possessed, hypnotised and as long as he is in that condition any talk of his manners is meaningless.

How many of us have some time or other thought of writing to Greta Garbo or Norma Shearer or Devika Rani or Sabita Devi ! There is a wide field of selection and one can pick one's type and choice. That is the stage of adoration and it is fortunate that most of us stop at that. Few muster the courage for actually inditing the letter and imploring the inevitable autographed photo. Fewer still have the perseverance and the opportunity to meet their idol in person. Those that survive this last stage of astral fever no longer remain fans. They become fiends. Footlight fiends.

In my own fan days my particular fancy used to be Marlene Dietrich. I hailed her as the one and only star for me. A big portrait of hers adorned my room. I am quite sure that I would then have forgotten my manners had there been the least chance of meeting her face to face. To-day I consider Marlene Dietrich all that a woman ought not to be. Her extravagant eyebrows, her bony-cheeked face, her curveless figure—all create a revulsion in me and I cannot stand her picture from a mile.

I know I am being utterly unfair (not to add unfaithful) to a very clever and capable actress. But I am lifting the veil off my own fan-past to give the reader a glimpse into the psychology of the star-struck. Honestly I don't regret, much less repent, my experience. I consider myself all the better for that astral purge.

The fan is a symptomatic product of modern civilization. We pride ourselves in being without any illusions. But verily the silver screen is the greatest illusion in history. The stars scintillate in their firmament and beckon us. Even the most fierce iconoclasts amongst us have had (in their teens) their own private idols before whom they burnt incense. Such illusions and idols are really essential for the mental equilibrium of the young. Even if they inflict a little harm in a few cases, on the whole they do a world of good.

The late teens and the early twenties are the years when we are bitten by the fan bug. I have yet to meet the fan above thirty. It is the adolescents who are the most fanly of fans. Sexually just become alive, emotionally in a welter, intellectually not matured, it is the boys and girls in their teens who are most susceptible to the footlight infection. I admit that, here and there, the celluloid gods and goddesses may corrupt the manners (and sometimes even the morals) of the young generation. But they also save it from emotional frustration.

After all the fever is so shortlived, howsoever

delirious it may become for the period. A child is all the more healthy for having gone through its measles and an adolescent, although transitionally he or she may behave like a prize ass, is all the better fitted for the serious business of life for having succumbed to the star craze.

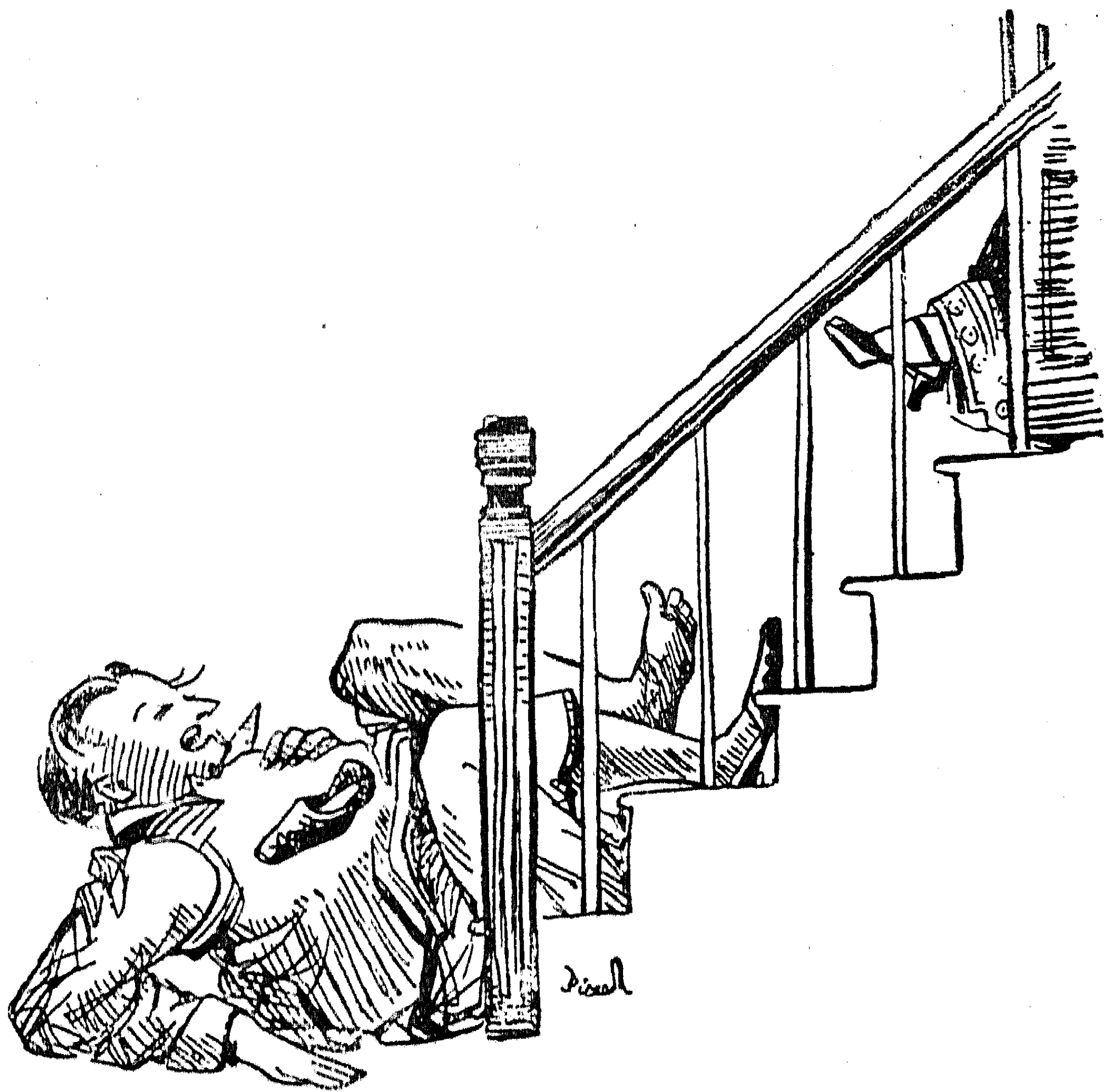
Escapism, which is the essence of fan-dom, is a psychological necessity of the present generation of Indian youths, whose feet are fixed in the East, whose heads are half-turned by the West, and whose minds are drifting in between. The silver screen serves as a sort of blacked-out Port Said to them, the meeting-house of the East and the West.

There they can let themselves go in a mad abandon, forget all the taboos and restraints and touch-me-nots of the society in which their lot is cast and give reins to their pent-up longings and libidos, complexes and inhibitions, without losing caste or their face either.

They can hitch their wagon to whatever star, starlet or planet they may be attracted by ; pester her with impassioned epistles ; phone her at all hours of the day and night on the offchance of being damned in her dulcet tones ; wall-paper their garrets with her pictures ; gate-crash her flat or studio to get chucked out from the paradisiacal presence by the well-trained *Durwan*, or (if one is lucky enough) to be kicked out by her own dainty foot : *Her very own*—Oh ! What an exquisite destiny !

It is a brief beatitude. A mad whirl. A most colourful life as long as it lasts. You are elated, enthralled. You walk on air although all the while your feet are firmly planted on the good earth. Nevertheless a sense of reality gradually dawns upon you. This inevitable reaction itself makes the fan's auto-intoxication so worthwhile. It acts as a prophylactic to the soul and gives you immunity from heart-attacks. In other words, it makes you hard-boiled.

And what is this phoney talk of film stars being fed up with their admirers and adorers, with the



...to be kicked out by her own dainty foot—Her very own!

autograph-hunters and bouquet-bringers, and with all the gaga boys and giggling girls ? What is this high heresy of the poor dears only wanting to be allowed to do their work in peace and privacy ?

The fans may be flatterers, idiots, insufferable bores and boors. But they are fans all the same ; the air, water and the sun so essential for the astral art to bloom ; the human pabulum on which alone the high-strung personality of the stars can thrive.

No ! The true artiste born to her art requires none of the long-winded intellectual appraisals of cold-blooded critics. She wants the warming fire of the human heart ; the heart which lies at her feet and goes to her head ; the heart which her fan alone can hand her on a salver, to be squeezed or spurned as she pleases. Only in this way can her soul flower ; from Salome to Shirley Temple they will tell you the same tale. Sometimes in a mood of contrariety, My Lady may protest too much ; but that is only a passing, perverse manner of saying *Thank You !* to her fans.

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XXII. DEAR SIR,—

NO! This is not a Letter to the Editor. I only wish to pay my humble homage to the Letters and to their authors, incidentally putting in a word for the Editors, too, if possible.

I am moved to do this thanksgiving service after having read about the champion letter-writer—of Letters to the Editor, I mean. He is the Rev. J. P. Bacon Phillips, of Burgess Hill, Sussex, who claims to have written nine thousand letters to the press.

Just ponder over that figure for a moment. It means that the good padre, who is hale, hearty and eighty-one, must have written a Letter to the Editor every day for a quarter of a century. It must have been a sacred ritual with him to dispatch his daily contribution to the four quarters of the globe. He claims to have outdistanced his nearest rival by at least four thousand letters—a very formidable margin indeed! When asked to explain what impelled people to write to the editors, Mr. Phillips replied: “I cannot tell you. Much good can be done by letters in the press and I have always tried to help, to instruct and to amuse.”



...rouses one's homicidal instincts.

That is as good an excuse as any, though I personally consider letter-writing to the editor as purely an epistolary itch. Morley once described writing letters as "that most delightful way of wasting time." But nothing can be more delightful and less a waste of time than Letters to the Editor. Not only writing them, but reading them as well. The very fact that Letters to the Editor show no signs of decline either in their number or length, though personal correspondence is becoming a lost art owing to the tempo of modern times, proves that they are a cherished adjunct of the Fourth Estate.

They can well be called a national institution.

Their value as a pointer to the prevailing public opinion cannot be exaggerated. They provide the truest expression of *Vox Populi* and they are to the rulers of a country what the pulse of a patient is to the doctor. The correspondence columns no less than the editorial ones are an integral and indispensable part of a newspaper.

Having paid my due meed of praise to the letter-writers, I hope I shall be forgiven if I pass on a few trade secrets to my readers. The daily post-bag is one of the major worries of an editor's life. It requires the patience of a Job and the restraint that only comes out of long practice to wade through the exuberant eloquence of the worthy correspondents. Most of the letters, if the cruel truth must be told, only deserve to be consigned to the kindness of the w.p.b. That they are not, is solely due to the heroic self-control of the editor and the perspiring, blue-pencilling perseverance of his subs.

Knocking that illegible, ungrammatical and long-winded manuscript into some semblance of shape and sense almost rouses one's homicidal tendencies—as I can vouch from my personal experience. And legion is the name of the scribes who rush to the *Dear Sir* with their views, observations, criticisms, nostrums and what not? The pens of the *Pro bono publico* are so prolific that occasionally a whole issue can be printed out of their outpourings.

Numerous are the subterfuges employed by long-suffering editors to check this spate of correspondence.

They make typed manuscripts compulsory ; admit only those written on one side of the paper ; enjoin the enclosure of a stamped and self-addressed envelop ; admonish their contributors to be terse and concise ; and finally warn them that they (the editors) are after all free to publish the letters or not, or in as mutilated a form as they please ! Again, the practice of giving "Points from Letters" or "Letters in Brief," which all editors have sooner or later to resort to, conveys a hint—and not a very covert hint at that—to the correspondents to stop their endless rigmaroles.

That editorial guillotine "Correspondence on this topic must now cease," or "This controversy is now closed," descends again and again on the heads of the faithful. Notwithstanding all such hurdles, hindrances and hedges, the heroic tribe of correspondents flourishes still. The epistolary industry must be one of the most prosperous in the world !

Apart from being an admirable mirror of public opinion, Letters to the Editor also serve many other useful purposes. Cholerick politicians and indignant housewives find in them an excellent safety valve for letting off steam. Their quarrelsome propensities are satisfied by the wordy warfare and a breach of the public and domestic peace is thus avoided.

The letters reflect again all the popular idiosyncracies of the moment and thus provide an unfailing source of amusement to future generations. Many are the hobby-horses ridden, the grievances aired and the prophecies indulged in these columns. Occasionally

a crafty contributor manages to pay off a personal score under the guise of a Letter to the Editor. Seasoned exponents of the art know how to keep their names recurring in the pages of the newspapers by timely resuscitation of closed controversies and by a vigorous flogging of dead horses, even when there are no issues of topical interest to tilt their lances at.

And finally I know a few journals whose very spicy correspondence is cooked entirely in their editorial kitchen. That is how they keep the ball (and the subscriptions) rolling (in) !

One must not, however, be too hard on these good folk who spend their time and labour for the entertainment, if not the enlightenment, of the public. They mean well by us though their enthusiasm often runs away with their discretion. We would lose a lot indeed if there were no correspondence columns in our newspapers. They give them the intimate touch. And shrewd editors are aware that they add to the circulation too !

It pleases the *amour propre* of the readers to find their views on the extermination of the bugs (or it might be the bandicoots) given such prominent publicity in their favourite paper. They are sure to buy a good many copies of that issue to be distributed among their relatives and friends.

——At least I did, when I made my juvenile journalistic debut with a thumping Letter to the Editor ! Did I walk on air that day ? Ask me another.

XXIII. FOODS AND FADS

MORE unmitigated nonsense is written on the subject of human diet in a week than upon any other subject in a year.

Alone among the animal creation, man is never content with the bounty of nature as it is and is forever trying to discover new delicacies for his palate. From the earliest dawn of history, dietetic experiments have been going on and they will probably go on forever. Epicures and ascetics, kings and commoners, cannibals and those who are supposed to live on mere air and water,—all have devoted a lot of time and money to the pursuit of this hobby.

The story is told of Gaius Apicius, the Roman, who spent a sum of £800,000 on the luxuries of the table. When only £80,000 of his fortune remained, he hanged himself thinking death preferable to “starvation on such a miserable pittance!” Lucullus is well-known as the prince of gourmets. Cleopatra of Egypt is said to have dissolved pearls in her wine to give it a richer aroma. From these historical characters to Mahatma Gandhi is no doubt a far, far cry, but the fact remains that the Mahatma, too, is impelled by

But perhaps there is no better cause—for food is after all the *causa causans* of creation !

As long as this fatuity extends to food *qua* food, it may be tolerated in a way. But when food transcends the limits of a table talk and becomes an obsession, one must cry halt. Col. Dr. Moonje has for many years now been harping upon the necessity of Hindus eating meat to develop a martial spirit. Unfortunately nobody took him seriously except those who wanted an excuse for their forbidden indulgence.



*Dr. Moonje has been long harping upon the necessity of
Hindus eating meat.*

Some months ago another Messiah offered exactly the opposite advice.

Mr. Peter Freeman, the President of the Vegetarian Society of Britain, honestly believes that the spectre of a world war could be very easily exorcized if only the world adopted a strict code of vegetarianism. Meat and Mars, according to Mr. Freeman, go hand in hand and humanity would become a big colony of mutually loving lambs, if only it would stop partaking of mutton cutlets and such other delicacies. The world, observed the peace-loving Peter, was growing more pugnacious and more quarrelsome. One of the reasons of this deplorable tendency is that more and more countries are taking to eating meat.

Of the three Oriental countries, which Mr. Freeman believes were vegetarian until lately, Japan has already gone the evil way of meat-eaters. "China and India, vegetarian countries, were still peaceful." (They are neither wholly vegetarian nor wholly peaceful, but let that pass. Now fortify yourself with a good fillet and hear the peroration of peace :) "Vegetarianism, therefore, had a large part to play to prevent a world war...All the trouble of the world would cease if they were able to prevent meat-eating."

If pacifism would flourish by vegetarianism, the converse that the greatest war-mongers must be the strictest non-vegetarians must also hold true. Following such a theory Mussolini must be living on nothing save meat (and that, too, possibly raw and almost dripping with blood). And Hitler must have at least

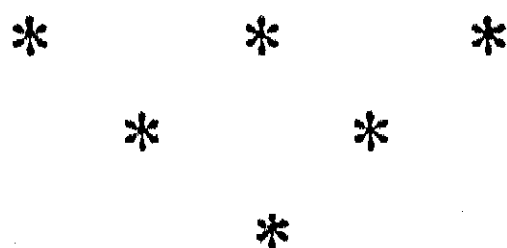
a penchant for well-done ham. Actually, however, the Fuehrer is a notorious vegetarian and even the Duce habitually avoids meat. Here is a typical menu of his, as personally communicated to an American interviewer recently : "In the morning I have a cup of coffee and fruit ; at noon I have soup or broth and fruit ; and at night I have fruit. I never touch meat, but sometimes have a little fish."

The nourishment of martial ruthlessness on an utterly meatless diet will no doubt confound Mr. Freeman and Dr. Moonje alike. On the other hand, it bears out Bernard Shaw's dictum that it is the vegetarian diet which is at the root of all human bellicosity. A man who has fed himself well upon steaks, fillets and the like is, according to Shaw, a man who is at peace with his fellow beings !

Vegetarianism again is rather an ill-defined term. Are eggs, for instance, vegetarian or non-vegetarian ? Orthodox Hindus view them with as much horror as they do any other animal food, while, I am sure, even the good Mr. Freeman, the President of the British Vegetarian Society, must be regularly taking a couple of hard-boiled eggs with his breakfast. What again of milk ? Under which category is it to go ? Yes, the milk which is our very first sustenance in this world. It is no doubt considered to be a *pucca* innocent beverage...yet, think it over ! Is it really vegetarian ? —I ask you.

Here is G. K. C.'s answer to the query :

*No more the milk of cows
Shall pollute my private house
Than the milk of the wild mares of the Barbarian.
I shall stick to port and sherry
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XXIV. SCHOOL FOR DICTATORS

WE WERE informed by *Reuter* a few months ago that a course teaching students "How To Be A Dictator" would be given at the Colgate University next year.

The plans must be pretty well advanced by now and within a few terms the world will be flooded by ready-made dictators with the brand-new diplomas in their pockets. The American Universities are famous for their unorthodox curricula and novel courses. They have turned out many D.D.s and B.B.B.s, who doubtless are utilizing their academical accomplishments in the best possible manner. Let me hasten to add that D.D. does not connote a doctorate of divinity but of dish-washing. And B.B.B. means, as clever readers must have already guessed, a Bachelor of Boot-Blackening!

It is no use being jocose at the cost of these very original awards. A shine on your shoes is one of the main indexes of your culture, according to the standards of modern civilization. The expert dish-washer again has a far better chance of making a living in the

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the same desire to investigate the eternal problem of provender, even though it might not be for his own delectation.

No popular newspaper would be complete to-day without a regular feature for food and articles on "The Balanced Diet," or "What to eat for your health," or some such stuff. These topics are unfailingly popular, which is natural considering that while only a few lose sleep because of Franco's bombing of Madrid, all of us have occasionally to miss it owing to a bout of indigestion.

The interior man is more with the most of us than the intellectual and a disquisition on diet interests the high-brows and low-brows alike. Food has always had its faddists but the discovery of vitamins multiplied their number a million-fold. For every qualified scientist who is working on this problem, there are a thousand cranks and quacks—apart from the large number of journalists who are neither cranks nor quacks, but who seize upon this subject as a hardy topical to fill their own bellies!

New vitamins are yet being discovered and old ones discarded as of no value. Meanwhile the claims of vegetarianism *v.* non-vegetarianism; of cereals *v.* fruits; of cooked food *v.* non-cooked food; of food cooked on steam *v.* that cooked directly on fire; of food cooked in aluminium pots *v.* that in pots of other metals; of food cooked on coal *v.* on gas *v.* on electricity—these and a variety of claims and counter-claims are being fought with a zeal worthy of a better cause.

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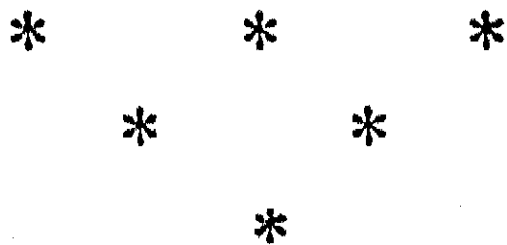
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present-day world than, say, an expert in Aristotelian ethics.

Hence I deprecate the tendency to look askance at the products of American Universities and to be over-critical of the letters they append to their names. On the contrary I heartily applaud this admirable adaptability to changing times and the spirit of enterprise and invention shown in the institution of such degrees.

The prospectus of the new Degree of Dictatorship aptly affirms that "Dictators are here for a while, and the students might just as well know how they work. It will be part of their education." The genius behind this scheme is Dr. Rodney L. Mott, Director of the University's School of Social Sciences, who has already prepared a complete syllabus of the course. The methods employed by the Dictators and the way in which they rise to power will be analysed. An attempt will also be made to show that dictatorships have come from writings of intellectuals, or from economic factors, or from psychological post-war attitudes and military factors.

Towards the end of the course the students will consider the actual working of a government under a Dictator. Such subjects as the new constitutions in the dictator-controlled nations, the relation of the State to industry, the position of religion, civil liberties and the importance of propaganda will be studied. One is, however, neither informed how many months of instruction will be required to turn

out a full-fledged graduate nor the names and qualifications of the professorial staff, who will coach the budding dictators.

Admirable as this syllabus is, one may be allowed to say that there is scope for its improvement. I gratefully avail myself here of a few suggestions made by a fellow scribe. First, it would be unwise to stress too much the modern character of dictatorship. After all, dictators have always been with us. There ought to be, therefore, a historical study of the subject starting with Tutankhamen or whoever the earliest dictator might have been.

A comparative study of the philosophy and technique of ancient and modern dictators would prove highly instructive. Students should be asked to take a special dictator for their intensive study, as students of philosophy select a Special Philosopher in our universities. In course of time a number of authorities will be thus created whose opinion will be the last word on the particular dictator concerned.

Next, after dealing with the historical and philosophical side of dictatorship, one must pay attention to its essential practical aspects. Personally I feel that this is the most important field for study, research and invention. Every budding dictator above everything else must be trained to discover the correct attitude, attire and salute.

These three are the most important things in this dictatorship business. Much naturally depends upon the candidate's figure and personality though I

need say little about it here. The would-be dictator will have to pay the closest attention to the problem whether he should give the air of a charging rhinoceros or of a sullen hippopotamus or merely look like a bilious bull, for he will have to stick to his stance throughout his career.

Next we come to attire. Here the aspirant must evince the greatest resourcefulness in choosing an appropriate colour for himself and his satellites. The problem has become extremely difficult owing to the fact that most of the hues of the rainbow have already been monopolised by the existing dictators. Perhaps a combination of colours like that on the back of a zebra would serve the purpose.

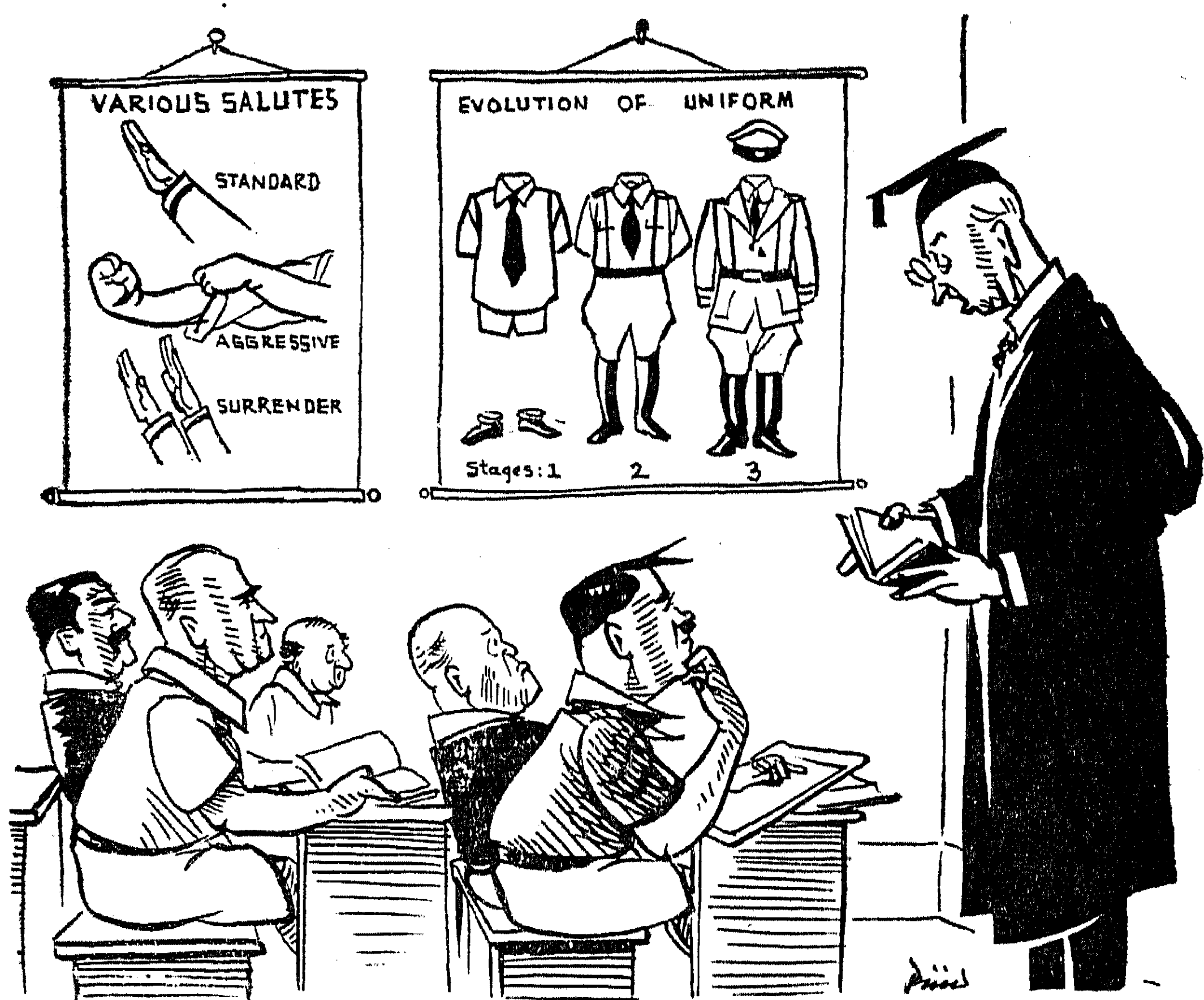
Last but not least is the salute. This also will provide a ticklish issue to the would-be dictator as all the motions of the right arm have already been pressed into service in the Fascist salute, the Nazi salute, etc. A judicious use of the legs may perhaps, surmount this difficulty. The motion of a smart kick will, for example, be a very suitable salutation for a brand-new dictator. It would be so expressive apart from its originality.

Then perhaps Dr. Mott would be well-advised to extend the scope of his activities by instituting a correspondence course on the subject. I guarantee him a record number of students who would plump for this postal tuition. First there is the large army of hen-pecked husbands who would seize the heaven-sent opportunity, forthwith fortify themselves with

the Colgate Course, and in due time dare their better halves to nag their worst.

There are infinite possibilities in this field for the School of Dictatorship. Then there are the people who suffer from inferiority complex, who would certainly prefer a full-blooded course in Dictatorship to the present numerous colourless recipes of improving their personality. Why aim at mere improvement when you can attain perfection for the asking?

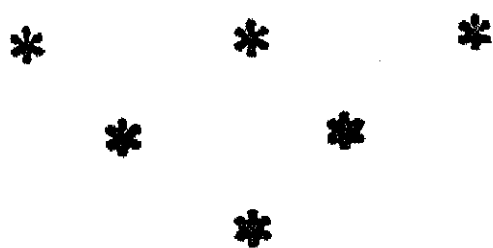
Perhaps we are altogether on the wrong track? May I, therefore, make one more and final suggestion to the enterprising Dr. Mott? Instead of starting a School of Dictatorship, why not start a School for



Why not start a school for dictators?

Dictators ? Yes, a regular school for educating the present-day dictators ! It is notorious that all of our modern dictators had their education sadly neglected in their childhood.

Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin—all played the truant from their schools, and were recognized as rowdies among their pals. The world has to pay heavily indeed for the neglect of Papa Hitler (Schicklgruber) and Papa Mussolini ! One hopes it is not too late to repair the intellectual omissions of the dictators concerned. The world will become a far safer and happier place indeed if Dr. Mott succeeds in injecting some belated wisdom in the thick and swollen heads of our dictators !



XXV. TILL DEATH DO US PART!

OF ALL the topsyturvy things we are witnessing in the world at present, perhaps the most topsyturvy is the boom in the marriage market.

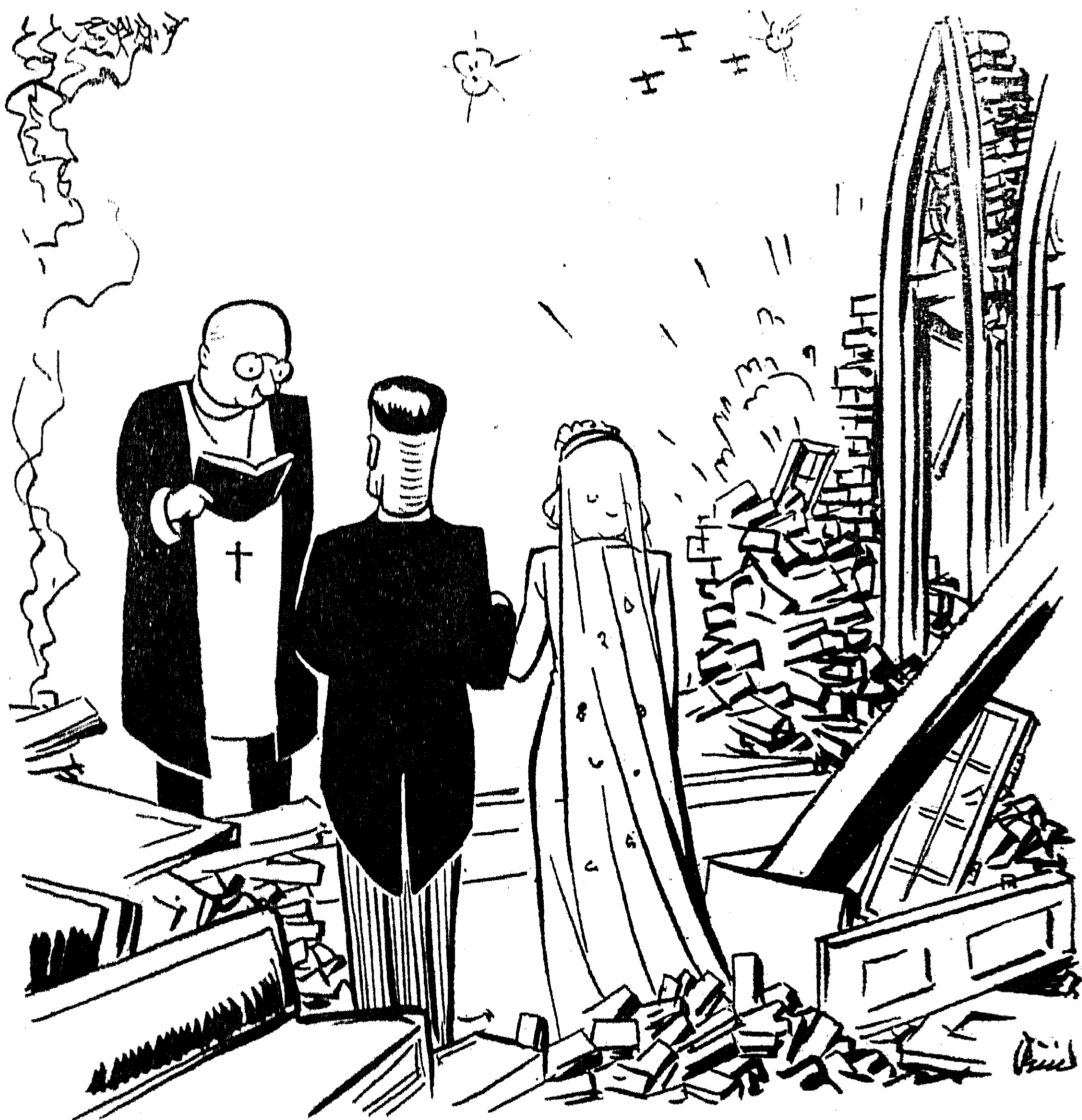
There has been a hectic rush towards the hymeneal altar and the registrar's office in all the European nations ever since the declaration of war. Even before the beginning of hostilities, when the crisis was gradually reaching its climax, it was revealed that four times the normal number of people had announced their intention to get married.

One Superintendent Registrar in London dealt single-handed with forty applications in twelve hours that time. Long queues waited at every registrar's office either to be married or to give notice of marriage. There were numerous applications for special licenses. Since the war began, a number of extra registrars have been appointed to cope with the rush and many of the territorials have been given special leave for getting married and to enjoy a brief honeymoon, before the maw of Mars swallows them.

In France, the Minister of Justice has declared drastic relaxations of the marriage regulations. Under

the new code the French soldier has not to pay any license fee and in special cases he can get himself married by proxy ! Similar things are happening in Germany, Italy and even in the neutral countries. There is a conflagration in Europe and none knows when the fire will spread to his own quarter.

Of all the mad things they are doing in the West, this surely is the maddest. What earthly good will a marriage do to the young men and women ? For



Till death do us part !

all they know, the wedding bells may ring only their death knell. For confetti and rice they may have bombs and bullets. The main item of the bride's trousseau is the gas mask. And from the honeymoon the groom may be only stepping straight into the mortuary. What a marriage !

Why then this urge to be united for a brief moment, perhaps to be parted for ever ? Does it not sound utterly irrational—this eleventh-hour tying of the nuptial knot ?

It must be noted that these very couples who are now solemnising their marriages in such feverish haste were deferring their wedlock for years together. They persisted in their single blessedness in times of peace, when they might have well enjoyed a happy family life. Now when the sound of doom is calling them and when before them lies a vista of mutilation and murder, desolation and death, they are slipping on the rings.

Till Death do us part ! . . . When death is standing at the door to receive the newly-weds !

Ever since the last war thoughtful minds in Europe have been deeply worried over the falling birth-rate. France and England, Germany and Italy—all had the same tale to tell with minor variations. The post-war (or should they now be called pre-war ?) young men and women shunned matrimony. Even when they married, they avoided adding their quota to the nation's population.

drop in the birth-rate and by the end of the twenties it became the foremost problem of Europe.

Statesmen as well as sociologists were deeply concerned over the widespread tendencies, first to postpone marriage as long as possible and second, to curtail severely the number of offspring. Viewed from the national point, the rapidly declining population jeopardised the future of a country and its people, while there were a few Cassandras who foretold the end of the European race altogether, if the trend were not checked in time.

Marry and multiply therefore soon became the slogan of many European countries. Particularly the Dictators did their level best to increase the number of their people. The bigger the population they could command, the more onerous their claim for *Lebensraum* and the more pressing their need for a place in the sun.

It was Mussolini who first started the campaign for more babies in right earnest. Bachelorhood soon became all but a criminal offence. A bachelor was subjected to heavy taxation in Italy, while bonuses, and various privileges were freely offered to the progenitors of virile young Fascists.

The cue was taken by Germany and also by France, where the fall in the birth-rate was assuming appalling proportions. In the former country women lost their newly won freedom under the iron heel of Nazism. The main function of a woman, according to the Nazi pundits, was to produce children and yet more children. Birth-control was declared to be a

heinous crime and all good Nazis were enjoined to beget as many little Aryans as they could. France, too, though it could not follow the shock tactics of the totalitarian nations, did its utmost to stem the declining birth-rate.

Considering the Herculean efforts made, the response even in Italy and Germany was hardly reassuring. It was one thing to compel young men and women to marry : It was another to make them procreate. Even a dictator's power has its limitations and there was no magic wand which could make a people multiply like mice or rabbits, though I have read sinister reports of certain goings-on in the Nazi Labour Camps.

Children in modern times are nothing but cannon fodder. How should a woman then like to have a baby at all ? Better the frustration of childlessness than the mortal grief of a mother to find the fruit of her womb torn to shreds by a flying shrapnel.

The babies who were born in "the war to end war" attained to years of manhood just in time to enter the new war. What a thought it is ! What a certificate to modern civilization ! What prospects for humanity ! Marry and Multiply—to Kill and Die ! That is what it all amounts to.

The instinct that made young men and women lead a bachelor's or a spinster's life or, being married, to refrain from having children was sound after all . . . The guns that are booming all over Europe at present provide the most fitting reply to the question that has

been on the lips of scientists and philosophers for number of years.

What a kink, however, in human nature ! These very same guns are making our young men and women rush to the altar or to the marriage registry, though they know full well that they will have to part no sooner they are united.

So long they were planning and postponing and procrastinating... Peace was a time for deliberation and caution... But the guns are going and now there is no time to think.

Let us act ere the guns go at us.

Let us seal the love that has been cherished in our hearts so long.

Let us pledge our troth and challenge death itself to break it.

Till death do us part!—Let us say it at least in parting everlasting....

* * * 1859
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